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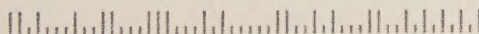
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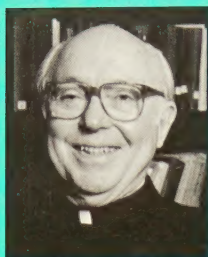
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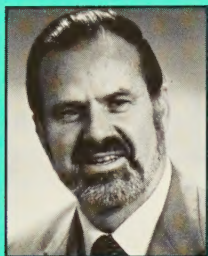




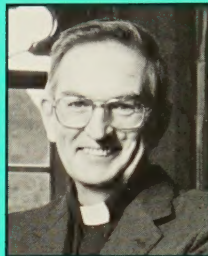
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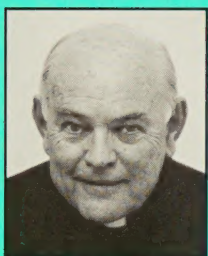
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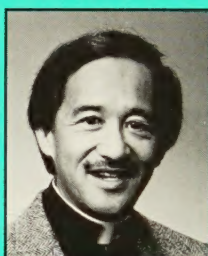
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# EDITOR'S PAGE

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## MIRACLES BY THE MILLIONS

A schoolgirl has to guess at the answers to a dozen or more of the true-false questions in a final history exam. When she later learns that her grade for the test is 100, she elatedly proclaims, "It's a miracle." Is there any reason she shouldn't call it that?

A truck driver going seventy miles an hour on a freeway desperately slams on the brakes when a car ahead of him skids on wet pavement and crashes into another vehicle. His truck comes to a stop only a few feet short of the wreckage, and in grateful surprise he thinks to himself, "I didn't hit them; it's a miracle." Who can say he's wrong in so classifying the event?

Pushing her way into a packed municipal bus at the end of an exhausting workday, a young woman prays trustingly, "Jesus, please find me a seat." A moment later, a passenger sitting close to where she is standing suddenly notices that he has reached his destination and leaves his seat, which she instantly occupies. "Another miracle. My life is just full of them," she reflects self-confidently. But does the incident really deserve to be labeled as a miracle?

Despite the fact that dictionaries generally define *miracle* as an extraordinary event in the physical world that bypasses all known natural or human powers, and one that manifests a special intervention on the part of God, many people today are using the term as a name for any happening they regard as marvelous or wonderful in some way. Last-minute touchdown passes thrown by Joe Montana, Steve Young, and other professional quarterbacks have so often been described as miracles by sportswriters that the term has practically lost its original meaning.

Nobody, of course, ought to be going around telling others what events they should or should not regard as miraculous. And if individuals perceive certain happenings as miracles, they surely have the right to describe or announce them as such. Notwithstanding the Catholic church's theologically strict definition of what constitutes a miracle, most folks have their own norms for identifying the miraculous, and they apply these criteria to life events in their own intuitive way.

If, on the other hand, you look at the church's traditional way of defining a medical miracle, you find some very specific requirements. To qualify, the event must involve the healing of a serious physical disease that has been treated without success, must have been confirmed by a laboratory procedure (e.g., x-ray or biopsy), and must have been cured completely and rapidly, with the cure lasting for a long period of time without any recurrence of the pathology. Moreover, before the church will officially recognize a miracle as genuine, a panel of theologians must determine whether the cure—not being explainable in terms of any scientific laws—has resulted from prayer. These are the criteria applied in the church's official process of deciding whether a person who died with a reputation for holiness is now living among the saints in Heaven. At least one validated miracle resulting from prayerful petitions to God through the holy person's intercession is required before the Vatican's Congregation for the Causes of Saints will recommend the miracle to a board of cardinals and the pope for their approval. This procedure for the canonization of saints has been followed in Rome ever since the pontificate of Benedict XIV in the 1700s.

People whose lives have been touched by the truly miraculous generally experience a strengthening of their faith in God and God's goodness, in the power



of prayer, in their sense of the worth and meaning of their life, in their hope for ultimate union with God, and in their grateful love for God, for life, and for others. They usually decide to do something significant with the remainder of their lives in order to express their gratitude.

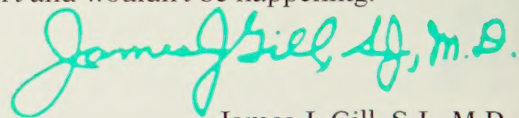
Finding an empty seat on a crowded bus or a place to park one's car on a busy street can be called a miracle, but I think such use of the term tends to cheapen it. In such instances, there is no evidence at all that a law of nature has been suspended or that God has in some special way intervened in human events. Nor is there such evidence when someone gambles a few dollars and by chance wins a lottery, then declares (as we have all grown to expect), "It's a miracle."

Yet maybe it's good that people have learned to describe as miracles the everyday events that add joy, beauty, or excitement to their life. Perhaps some day they will think their way into the same profound sense of awe that prompted Walt Whitman to write: "To me every hour of the light and dark is a miracle, every cubic inch of space is a miracle." They may even adopt the attitude of global wonder that Voltaire expressed: "All is a miracle. The stupendous order of nature, the revolution of a hundred million worlds

around a million suns, the activity of light, the life of all animals, all are grand and perpetual miracles."

While gazing at a star-sprinkled sky on a warm summer night, hearing an ocean's incessant waves pound thunderously against a coastal shore, or seeing gloomy gray clouds spread a soft blanket of dazzling whiteness over a range of jagged peaks, who could ever be wrong in exclaiming, "It's a miracle"?

But if we reach that wonderful moment in life when our heart spontaneously sings out with joy that "a hundred million miracles are happening every day" (as Rodgers and Hammerstein reminded us in the musical *Flower Drum Song*), and if we learn to recognize as miracles the red and gold leaves of autumn, the aptitude of a mind to contemplate, and the ability of a friend to remain faithful, we will do well not to forget that where even these ordinary miracles exist, God's design and activity are being manifested. Without God's presence and love, they just couldn't and wouldn't be happening.



James J. Gill, S.J., M.D.  
Editor-in-Chief

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# Religious Leadership in The Dawning Century

*Peter J. Bray, F.S.C., Ed.D.*

**I**t is now virtually taken for granted that religious life in the twenty-first century is going to be different from what it has been and what it is. All the challenges that will need to be faced and addressed are not yet clear, for there will be many uncertainties, much chaos, and numerous possibilities. Today, at the end of the twentieth century, how adequately are men and women religious preparing for this different world?

In their book *The Future of Religious Orders in the United States: Transformation and Commitment*, David Nygren and Miriam Ukeritis have published the results of their Religious Life Futures Project in an attempt to provide some insights into ways of dealing with the anticipated complexities of religious life in the next century. In their research, the authors have identified leadership as an increasing concern in religious orders. They have found the most striking deficit among leaders to be the "inability to formulate a strategy to accomplish a purpose or mission." Nygren and Ukeritis discuss in detail various competencies they have identified as being necessary for improving leadership in religious life. They emphasize that it is necessary for those "aspiring to meet at least typical standards for leadership in a religious congregation" to have these competencies.

In the future, leadership will be a crucial element in the functioning of religious life. The nature of this leadership, however, must be examined carefully and understood in a way that will further the purpose of religious life. The Religious Life Futures Project failed to address these central needs. Instead, it focused on the peripheral topics of traits and group facilitation, goal attainment and effectiveness, and situations and style.

Our understanding of leadership in religious life has changed and must continue to change. The move away from the rigor of the old way of living as religious to a new way has not been easy. People who were brought up in a very different system have had to make enormous shifts. As Father Gerald Arbuckle says so clearly in a recent *Review for Religious* article entitled "Prophecy or Restorationism in Religious Life," there has been a debunking of the old myths associated with being Catholic and particularly with being a religious. As yet, new myths have not emerged that will enable people to cope fully with the task of making sense of their existence. However, there is still the need to debunk the old myth associated with leadership in the religious life. Women and men religious, whose meaning-making mechanisms have collapsed, must create new meaning for their lives—an awesome task. There is a danger of looking



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## Women and men religious must find ways of living with the ambiguity that is inevitably part of life at the end of the twentieth century and will certainly characterize life in the twenty-first century

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for security by returning to former approaches and trying to recreate the past; this will not work.

Men and women religious must walk out on the water, as Peter did (Matt. 14:28–33), and trust that the Lord will be a source of support for them. There is a call for taking risks that will enable religious to live lives that are personally fulfilling while also enabling them to live out the Good News. Women and men religious must find ways of living with the ambiguity that is inevitably part of life at the end of the twentieth century and will certainly characterize life in the twenty-first century. They will need to create a framework that will give meaning to their lives and out of which new myths will arise. This task of creation is crucial, not only for the health of the individuals but also for the health of religious and faith communities.

Part of risk taking is letting go of cherished mental models. Jesus moved into the unknown and passed over into a new way of living by placing himself in the prophetic tradition of his people, as he did when he called the people to repent and believe in the Good News (Mark 1:15). He invited his followers to allow the power of God to reign in their lives by letting go of their own ways of doing things. That call and challenge is extended to us again at the end of this century.

### SHIFT IN PARADIGM

In the course of the past thirty years, many religious have responded to the same call. In further de-

veloping the initiatives for renewal put forward during Vatican II in the *Constitution on the Church*, religious have become much more attentive to a collegial manner of working. The Council seems to have touched on an important aspect of what will characterize life in the twenty-first century. There seems to be an emerging cry for people to work together and to fight against the individualism that is rampant in society. There is a change underway in the constellation of values and priorities out of which people in Western society live their lives. This change is reflected in, among other things, the move toward communitarianism, the increasing demand people are making to have some say in their destiny, and the growing awareness of environmental concerns. Many people refer to this as a paradigm shift that is becoming more and more evident. Such a shift will have a significant impact on how religious life is lived in the future. The decision that has to be made is whether men and women religious will continue to live with vestiges of past approaches to religious life or read the signs of the times and find more adequate ways of living out the gospel as the twenty-first century approaches: "Today, I am offering you life or death, blessing or curse. Choose life, so that you and your descendants may live, in the love of Yahweh your God" (Deut. 30:19).

Arbuckle quite rightly comes down firmly on the side of finding more adequate ways of being religious in the twenty-first century. He addresses the various ways in which religious women and men can escape from the challenging and rather ambiguous path that must be followed if they are to have any impact on how human beings live the gospel in the next century. Ways that worked in the past will not necessarily work in the future, because past approaches were based in a context of industrial ways of thinking. That context was characterized by a positivistic, quantitative, clockwork, mechanical, piecemeal, and linear approach that placed considerable emphasis on logical order and the place that everything had in the order of things.

In the wider world of business and society, many studies have clearly demonstrated that the industrial paradigm, which has provided the thought context for previous generations, is not an appropriate one for future generations. The industrial context put an emphasis on compliance as a central idea that people accepted. The pervasive use of a paternalistic autocracy was simply the obvious application of hierarchical thinking. It no longer works, as was graphically shown in the recent downfall of Eastern Europe. The old way no longer makes sense of all the variables, nor does it resolve the problems that arise. In the midst of the drabness of Eastern Europe, the hu-



man spirit has burst forth from safety through compliance and is longing for something better. To move out of the bind of the industrial paradigm, people require a framework that provides new meaning—a framework that allows them to cope with a new context while it is still being created.

## NEW THINKING REQUIRED

What is needed is another revolution. The industrial revolution, while resulting in so many wonderful improvements, has had negative implications that are mirrored in the catalogue of horrendous problems facing humankind—including world hunger, the exploitation of the planet, and the despoiling of the environment. The new revolution needs to liberate the visionary powers within people who have reached the limits of the technocratic society. People who are willing to take the risk to work together must highlight the impoverishment of our present state and have the courage to untangle the terrible paradox of progress, in which improvements are often coupled with disasters.

A starting point in this task is to grasp the nature of organizations. For men and women religious, this involves coming to understand the nature of their congregations. Such a move is necessary if there is to be any prospect of changing a congregation. Religious congregations are not physical realities that can be examined under a microscope. Rather, they are organizations that essentially are created out of the interdependent and collaborative relationships of their members—people who have voluntarily agreed to live out the gospel in a particular way. These relationships can be known only by observing the behaviors of the people who make up a congregation.

Given that religious congregations do not exist in a concrete form, it follows that the only way people can speak about them is with the use of metaphors. Obviously, the metaphor we select to speak about religious life will determine how we understand it. It is not possible to think about religious life separately from the language and metaphors we use. Reality is filtered through the linguistic systems that govern our thoughts.

## NEW METAPHORS NEEDED

Over time, women and men religious have developed a set of metaphors with which to speak about religious life, drawing on things that have been most familiar to them. Thus, language relating to superiors, subjects, vows, and community has assumed certain accepted connotations. Al-

though these metaphors may have been appropriate to the context in which they were selected, we must ask how appropriate they are for describing the pattern of relationships that should exist in religious life as we move toward the twenty-first century. That critical question points to a major problem that has arisen in the use of language about religious life. Metaphors that were suitable at a particular time in the past have become accepted and fixed as the only way of thinking about religious life. As a result, people find it difficult to think about religious life without accessing those metaphors and their contexts. A significant obstacle to dealing with this mindset is that many people do not realize that they are using metaphors. In the words of the old man in Patricia Warren's novel *One Is the Sun*, "The person who lives in the square mind of today will have a hard time imagining what the world is like for people who see all Life as Circles . . . they believe they understand the Circle mind. But they underestimate that their own thinking is square. So they translate everything through the square." It is difficult for religious to develop a new set of metaphors and contexts. The established ones have become the touchstones for their experience of religious life.

If the fit between the metaphors and religious life does not deal adequately with the nature of the relationships that exist, the logical thing to do is to change the metaphors. While in theory this is obvious, in practice it is not that simple. The reason is that the current metaphors are lodged in a larger understanding of reality that would be severely disrupted if the metaphors were changed. Because the prevailing metaphors, such as hierarchy, have become paramount for people in religious life, community relationships are put under pressure to conform to those metaphors. Many inappropriate metaphors, such as superior and subordinate, are still being used because of the disruption of meaning that people fear if those metaphors are questioned or removed.

## HIERARCHICAL METAPHOR UNSATISFACTORY

The dominant metaphor that has been used in religious life is that of hierarchy. This may have been a suitable metaphor for the pattern of relationship that once characterized religious congregations—but it is neither the only way nor the best way to think about organizations. The industrial paradigm took the hierarchical model and canonized it to such an extent that most people have failed to realize that it is simply a model, a metaphor, and as such is not immutable. Experience over recent years indicates that the hierarchical metaphor is less and less satisfactory



as a way for people to make sense of their worlds. People in religious orders and institutes will be influenced by this general trend in society. Religious life will not escape the paradigm shift that is occurring in the wider community. This is made more poignant by the call from Vatican II to read the signs of the times and respond appropriately. The signs of the times at the end of the twentieth century show a clear change in the underlying constellation of values and priorities people are using.

In the midst of these changes, a significant number of people are lost and feel adrift. A consequence is that many people are calling for more leadership from government, industry, church, religious orders, and other organizations to avert the pending disaster. The problem with these calls, however, is that they arise from an industrial understanding of leadership and thus tap into the same base of operation that caused the problems. The industrial model led the world into the functional position it is in; more of the same will simply compound the paradox of progress incorporating disaster. The Religious Life Futures Project was embedded in the industrial model. Leadership, as described in that study, is invested in the individual and essentially consists of doing what the leader wants. What is needed is a new approach to leadership that bypasses the industrial assumptions that have had such a disastrous impact on the course religious congregations—and the world—have taken.

## REVOLUTIONIZING LEADERSHIP

In his book *Leadership in the 21st Century*, Joseph Rost maintains that the industrial model of leadership is not working. It is a model based on the assumptions that leadership is good administration and that leadership resides in great women and men who have "certain preferred traits, who influence followers to do what the leaders wish in order to achieve group/organizational goals that reflect excellence, defined as some kind of higher-order effectiveness." It is obvious that the Religious Life Futures Project was based on these assumptions. As Nygren and Ukeritis write, "Outstanding leaders are more concerned . . . with exerting power and influence to attain congregational goals" and "bear the burden of responsibility for monitoring the policies and establishing the direction of [their] institutions." The authors, in developing at length the qualities leaders must have in order to influence their followers to do what they want, end up describing a superperson. The same problem is illustrated in Donna Markham's conclusion about church leaders of the future in her article "Leadership for the Church's

Future" (HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, Spring 1994). Leadership in these cases is invested in individuals who hold responsibility for establishing and focusing a vision, enticing people to buy into that vision, and then ensuring that the vision is lived out. Such requirements place unrealistic burdens on individuals and are doomed to failure.

A new idea, a new approach is needed. Rost's articulation of such an approach seems to address some of the real shortcomings of the industrial model. In seeking to see beyond leadership residing in a person holding a position, Rost provided a framework in which leadership is viewed as a dynamic residing in a group or organization. He defined leadership as "an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes." In 1993 Rost revised his definition by substituting the word *collaborators* for the word *followers*. He argued in several recent works that the concept of followers connotes submissiveness and subordination, which buys into the understanding of leadership as getting people to do as the leader wishes and thus accepts the industrial paradigm of leadership. Collaborators, as a concept, connotes much more activity and involvement in the decision-making process of change and is much more attuned to the postindustrial paradigm. My own view of leadership definitely leans in the direction of collaborators rather than followers. When speaking about leadership in religious life, however, I am more inclined to use the Ignatian term *companions* because of the common commitment and shared purpose it connotes.

Rost's approach moves beyond the great man/woman, do-what-the-leader-wants, and trait theories that are part of the industrial paradigm of leadership. In contrast to those theories, Rost maintains that the very nature of leadership resides in the dynamic of the relationship that exists among a group of people. The nature of the relationship and the purpose of its existence are central in this new understanding of leadership that is intended to bring about real changes.

## ELEMENTS OF LEADERSHIP

Rost's definition of leadership requires four elements:

1. *The relationship is based on influence.* This means persuasion is used to garner support, but it is a noncoercive persuasion. In addition, the influence is multidirectional, not just top-down.
2. *The relationship is an active one involving leaders and companions.* All the participants exercise leadership. Leadership resides within the relationship, so there is no such thing as followership.



3. *Leaders and their companions intend real changes.* Here *intend* means that something definite is envisaged. It also means that leaders and companions do not have to achieve change for leadership to be present; they need only intend it and then act on that intention. The intention is in the present, whereas the changes are in the future. *Real* refers to substantive and transforming changes, not pseudo ones.
4. *What leaders and their companions intend reflects their mutual purposes.* The intended changes must be a common challenge, not just what the leader wants. The common purposes arise out of the noncoercive influence relationship that develops within the group.

Such an understanding has considerable significance for the future of religious life because it places responsibility for the life of a community on the members of that community, not on an individual who occupies a position in the community or on provincials and congregational administrators. If the leadership dynamic is to exist in a community, the people in the group must influence one another to move toward intended changes that reflect their mutual purposes. In this understanding, leaders are the people who have the most influence at a particular time. These people bring their available personal resources to bear without coercion in seeking to move the group in a certain direction. At the same time, however, they are open to the influence of others. They are leaders at a particular time because other people are willing to be persuaded by what they have to offer as mutual purposes evolve. The leader is the person, at a given time, who is best able to articulate the needs of the group and to provide some clarity in the process of arriving at mutual purposes. Thus, it is possible for a great variety of people in the group to be leaders at various times as they use their resources to influence other companions. The companions choose the leaders with whom they will develop relationships—and those individuals may not be the people who have authority over the group.

The cooperativeness that enables the dynamic of leadership to occur can arise from a shared awareness of a need inadequately being addressed. Leadership is a collective effort rather than something one person does in a vacuum; it cannot be done alone. Leadership requires other people with whom the leader can interact. While each individual must take responsibility for ensuring that what she or he does contributes to the leadership dynamic, leadership itself arises cooperatively out of the shared awareness of the need that cries out to be met.

All the people in the group need to accept their responsibility to establish leadership. This can mean taking a major role in influencing the group to meet agreed-upon purposes, or being an effective companion in responding, clarifying, critiquing, or supporting the initiatives others are taking. The role of companion is crucial in determining which of the major influencing people will have the support needed to persuade the group to take a certain direction to achieve their purposes. If a situation arises in which real changes are needed for the good of the community or institute, then everyone must accept the responsibility to enter into the leadership dynamic.

## INSPIRING VISION ESSENTIAL

Such an understanding of leadership differs markedly from what has been customary in religious life. The new understanding of leadership articulated by Rost requires a very different metaphor. With the leadership dynamic residing in the relationship, both leaders and companions exercise leadership. The challenge for all who become involved in that dynamic is to develop a vision that will inspire and entice others to risk involvement. Such a vision needs to define values associated with the congregation and then provide a clear direction. This can mean drawing people into an awareness of their assumptions or the mental models that direct them. Eventually, it may mean providing them with the opportunity to be part of a community of learners who support and teach one another.

At the heart of the leadership dynamic is an influence relationship. For this influence relationship to prosper and become effective in bringing about changes, it must, over the course of time, always allow participants in leadership to disagree yet still remain in the dynamic. The influence that is exerted, however, can be highly persuasive and forceful. It can result in companions rethinking what they really want. Even so, as Rost points out, the use of coercion cannot be part of the leadership dynamic, because its use changes the relationship into one of authority, power, or dictatorship. Thus, the process of how a vision evolves into a reality becomes the determining factor in deciding the ethics of leadership.

If religious communities and institutes of the future are going to provide an environment that will encourage the development of the leadership dynamic, they will have to be administered in a way that enables leadership to happen. One of the key challenges is to change people's way of thinking about their community or institute. There is a clear link between the way people think and the way they



act. Many problems in an institute result from the way people think.

If religious in the future can respond to the call to create a context in which there is no fear—a context in which people are open to learning, individuals are prized, cooperation is encouraged, and people are assumed to want to learn and be involved—then the possibility for leadership will be greatly enhanced. Yet bringing about such change will not be easy. When people come together in a group, for whatever purpose, there is a dynamic at work that is complex, ambiguous, and paradoxical. This is the case in communities and institutes. Each person brings to the group a personality of incredible complexity, together with a life history. When all the individuals in the group arrange themselves in some working order, all their personal complexities are overlaid by a life the community assumes to be greater than the sum of the individuals' lives. People in the leadership dynamic, therefore, need to be reconciled to a messy, complex process if they wish to change a community or institute.

What is crucial about interdependence is not just the end result of working together but the process that people use to arrive at their collective goal. All those engaging in the leadership dynamic must respect each individual within the community or institute and work for change that they believe will raise their congregation to higher levels of motivation and morality.

## CREATING THE FUTURE

We all look toward the future, which by its nature is unknown. People gain a sense that their lives are intelligible and meaningful by seeing themselves as part of a narrative that is unfolding. Being part of a leadership dynamic in a community should be part of that narrative. Leadership can help individuals accept responsibility for their lives and for that of the community. Leadership can also provide people with an opportunity to reclaim a spiritual dimension in their lives. By stretching themselves with the certainty that others are alongside them, women and men religious, like Peter, can take the risk of venturing into unknown waters. They too can allow their creativity to give birth to different proposals to meet needs within the community. In doing this, a group of people can create an experience that promotes a sense of ownership and responsibility. In a real sense, leadership is expecting people to do the work of their

community, which requires a shared set of attitudes toward such responsibility.

Religious communities need a new way of thinking in order to energize themselves to develop leadership competencies in many members of the community and to pursue the changes that will enable them to meet the requirements of the twenty-first century. The new paradigm is still unfolding. Indications are, however, that there is a deep cry for a spiritual renewal that, if met, will result in a life-enhancing influence of considerable value. Such a renewal will offset the withering of the spirit in people who have been subjugated by the industrial paradigm. The fate of the soul has enormous implications for society.

Within this paradigm shift, the new understanding of leadership holds out hope to religious and secular communities seeking to overcome the ravages of the industrial model. It can bring us together to work toward creating a more just and loving world. It can open us to the surprises that arise in people's lives. The new understanding of leadership precludes a cookbook approach because it relies on people being free within themselves, and so having integrity; it demands that people take responsibility for their actions; and it insists on people making a commitment to seek after common purposes. With leadership of this nature, the possibilities for making creative changes in religious communities are exciting and a source of great hope.

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# Birthing the Elderly Self

*Mary Elizabeth Kenel, Ph.D.*

**A**s people enter their mature middle years and progress through the process of aging, they are faced with a number of developmental challenges that facilitate the birthing of the elderly self. In the face of the often negative stereotyping that is applied to the elderly, it is important to recall that this time of life is as much a developmental period, with an orientation toward growth, as are the earlier developmental periods, such as adolescence.

Rather than focus on old age as a time of decline, loss, and diminishment, we can view this period of life as one of challenge in the face of what sometimes appear to be rather overwhelming odds. This is not to ignore the importance of mourning our losses, of which there are many. Loss of youth, loss of physical strength, loss of interpersonal relationships through the deaths of peers and family members, loss of job status due to retirement, and loss of social status are but a few of the losses we experience in old age.

It is essential that we confront our fear of aging—a fear that is fed by our society's collective denial of aging and predominant focus on youth; a fear that is fostered by Madison Avenue and the advertising companies; a fear that causes many to enter what Carolyn G. Heilbrun calls “the circle of invisibility” and to hide the light of the wisdom acquired over a lifetime from themselves and from others.

While birthing the elderly self requires that we actively mourn our losses and confront our fears, Helen M. Luke, author of *Old Age: Journey into Simplicity*, stresses repeatedly the need for us to grow into old age, not merely fall into it. In her book *Creative Aging*, Mary Baird Carlsen, building on the work of an early developmental theorist, Robert Havighurst, presents a sequence of thoughtful questions that are useful during this time of transition. She challenges those interested in developing the elderly self to come to a new form of independent existence, to explore and implement a new lifestyle, to address issues of engagement and disengagement, and to evaluate the possibilities for exerting and asserting themselves within the reality of their physical, financial, and social-emotional limits.

In 1956 Robert Peck suggested a schema of alternatives that each contribute to the development of the elderly self. His alternatives are not either/or propositions; instead, they call for a refocusing and reintegration of energy, standards, and values as a person grows into his or her elderly self. Peck's ideas are similar to those expressed by the self-psychological analytic tradition. He suggests that at the outset of the aging process, we address such challenges as:



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**Body transcendence  
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cultural emphasis on  
youthful appearance  
and to value the  
essential elements that  
make us persons of  
character and inner  
beauty on the  
metaphysical level**

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1. Cathectic flexibility/cathectic impoverishment
2. Mental flexibility/mental rigidity
3. Socializing/sexualizing in human relationships
4. Valuing wisdom/valuing physical powers

#### **CATHECTIC FLEXIBILITY**

The first challenge, that of cathectic flexibility, asks that we develop a type of emotional flexibility that allows us to shift our emotional investments from one person to another and from one activity to another. This challenge relates to the completion of the necessary grief work that precedes the birthing of the elderly self. We must let go of emotional investments that are no longer viable and ready ourselves to establish new attachments. To fail in this area is to leave ourselves vulnerable to emotional impoverishment, which can occur as the elderly person gradually loses love objects, be they relationships, things, or work. As a person comes to have fewer and fewer things to care about, caring itself diminishes, with the result that the person shrivels up and dies interiorly long before he or she is physically dead.

The need to continue to be a caring person is one of the central points brought out by Erik and Joan Erikson in their book *Vital Involvement in Old Age*. Writing in conjunction with Helen Q. Kivnick, Ph.D., they stress the need for the development of "grand-

generativity," a form of caring that evolves from and moves beyond the midlife task of "maintaining the world." We must become an "aging parent" to adult children, a grandparent, and a trusted old friend, consultant, adviser, or mentor. While different from the social roles and interpersonal involvements appropriate to an earlier time in our lives, these roles allow us to make an investment in others and prevent the "dry rot" that accompanies a shutting down of the emotional system.

#### **MENTAL FLEXIBILITY**

Taking up the second challenge, mental flexibility, allows us to master experiences at this time of life while achieving a kind of detached perspective on them ("taking the long view"). This challenge encourages us to have less need for such personal filters as wishes, hopes, fears, anxieties, or limiting beliefs. It encourages us to free ourselves from stereotyped thinking and to be more accepting of ourselves and others.

The research conducted by the Eriksons suggested that the elderly persons they interviewed, when asked to compare their older and younger selves, described their current selves as "more tolerant, more patient, more open-minded, more understanding, more compassionate, and less critical." They spoke of not being "shocked" by events, being able to "see both sides" of an issue, feeling concern about issues they might have ignored in the past, and developing the faculty for entertaining a variety of points of view.

Not all elders rise as well to the challenge of mental flexibility. On the other side of the coin, there may be a greater tendency toward dogmatism of one sort or another, and toward being set in one's ways. Since Peck's challenges are not either/or propositions, even seemingly negative responses to them may have positive aspects. The Eriksons suggest, for example, that an increasing integration of one's own style (i.e., being set in one's ways) may actually permit a new understanding of others' preferences for their own styles.

#### **SOCIAL/SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS**

The third challenge suggests a rebalancing of the tensions and dynamics of social/sexual energy so that we can continue to enjoy the pleasures of interpersonal intimacy and sensuality while adjusting to the shifts of sexual energy that may come with age. This is not to suggest that we become asexual as we age. All of us continue to experience inclinations toward closeness, sensual pleasure, and sexual activity. It is important for elderly people to break with the stereotype of the asexual older person by continuing to



maintain a level of sexual activity compatible with their personal desires and commitments.

It is necessary to acknowledge, however, that the sexual quality of long-intimate relationships undergoes age-related changes. The most dramatic of these, in many instances, involves the loss of a spouse or life partner. A second major source of change can be a partner's debilitating illness, which renders sexual and sometimes emotional intimacy difficult. It becomes necessary to maximize other psychosocial strengths to compensate for such loss. Reminiscing allows some elderly people to reintegrate qualities of earlier-life tenderness, affection, and sexuality. For others, marital intimacy is replaced by an increased level of intimacy with adult children or other family members. Still others, searching for new sources of mutuality, develop active friendship networks, in which the individuals take on real responsibility for one another's ongoing well-being, providing reliable contact and sincere concern.

Looked at from another point of view, this challenge relates to Abraham Maslow's idea of the self-actualized person, who is able to transcend the "battle of the sexes" and who is able to relate to members of the opposite sex in ways that are collaborative rather than conflictual. The capacity for synergy and the ability to avoid dichotomies and to allow for the fusion of opposites are important features of this challenge. The need for collaborative relationships between men and women is echoed by a number of ecofeminists, who would not be content to limit this challenge to those of us who are aging. As Deena Metzger wrote in her essay "Invoking the Grove," which appeared in Judith Plant's book *Healing the Wounds: The Promise of Ecofeminism*, "a working system depends upon wholeness and completeness. A harmonious balance exists only when all parts are included. . . . we must be careful to encourage men, not to cut them out."

## VALUING WISDOM AND PHYSICAL POWERS

Peck indicates that in the process of birthing the elderly self, the fourth challenge is to put the use of our heads (wisdom) above the use of our hands (the entire physical system), both as a standard of self-evaluation and as a resource for solving life's problems.

This theme is echoed in Hyman L. Muslin's book *The Psychotherapy of the Elderly Self*. Muslin speaks of the need for aging persons to adjust their values or standards for themselves so as to alter their judgment of acceptable behavior. Put in the terms of the ego psychologists, aging people must temper their ideals of action and achievement. Not to do so evokes

only shame, because it is impossible for the elderly to live up to the standards of earlier life stages. Thus, by valuing wisdom, the proper ordering of all things, we are encouraged to relinquish outmoded attitudes and develop new ideals, standards, and goals that are in harmony with our new state in life.

Peck also maintains that we must move beyond an exclusive focus on physical well-being to find pleasure and comfort in other areas of living. Muslin suggests constellating around such culturally approved standards as becoming the mentor to a younger person rather than being the front-line worker, or becoming the person who links one generation to the next. He also contends that a standard allowing for greater dependency and for an appropriate level of role reversal with one's former dependents should come to be viewed as acceptable for the aging self. This concurs with one of the Eriksons' formulations—namely, the need for the elderly person not only to allow but also to encourage others to demonstrate caring toward them, and to do so in such a way that the accepting of care is in itself an act of caring. I would suggest that as we age, it is also important to develop our interior life and to value the spiritual capacity and wisdom we have accumulated.

In Peck's formulation, three additional challenges are appropriate to the later stages of life:

1. Body transcendence/body preoccupation
2. Ego differentiation/work-role preoccupation
3. Ego transcendence/ego preoccupation

## BODY TRANSCENDENCE

Body transcendence urges us to move out of and beyond the cultural emphasis on youthful appearance and to value the core of ourselves—the essential elements that make us persons of character and inner beauty on the metaphysical level. To achieve this transcendence requires that we make a conscious effort not to deny but to reach beyond the problems associated with declining bodily function, to maintain an interest in the world that is beyond the limits of physical pain. It urges us to take proper care of our bodies while recognizing and coming to terms with the inevitability of our physical death, at which point we will no longer be bound within our bodily frame and, like the chambered nautilus, will leave behind the confines of our earthly vessel and venture into the mystery that is beyond death.

## EGO DIFFERENTIATION

The challenge of ego differentiation offers us another opportunity to expand our definition of our-



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selves. For many of us, work roles have been major points of definition in our lives. But it is necessary to recall that the word *definition* also implies limitation. While it may be painful to let go of the status we have worked so hard to achieve, other roles are available for us to fill. Our elderly selves may wish to find fulfillment as mentors to the young, or in the role of grandparent or foster grandparent, or as a volunteer for a cause that we embrace because of its cultural, civic, political, religious, or social service importance. Some of us may wish to take on roles that are offshoots of our main occupations, whereas others may wish to make a dramatic change and give birth and voice to aspects of the self that were put on hold during our working years. The number of potential roles is limited only by the bounds of our own willingness to explore alternatives and grow.

#### **EGO TRANSCENDENCE**

The last of the challenges Peck puts before us is the most significant, as it calls on us to consider and deal with the loss of our individual egos and separate selves. It requires entering into the "dark night" of the ego and developing beyond a narcissistic preoccupation with the survival of our individual selves. It means coming to terms with personal death and facing this with a serenity born of the sure knowledge that through the children we have nurtured, through

friendships, or through mentoring, we have built a longer and broader future than any one ego could encompass.

These challenges are echoed and expanded upon by the work of Erik and Joan Erikson, who continued their research efforts when they and the persons they studied were well beyond 80 years of age. As they noted, the process of forming an identity continues into the last phase of life and is marked by the virtues of caring and wisdom.

In dealing with the concept of grand-generativity, for example, the Eriksons noted that this does not exclusively concern one's own grandchildren, although they indeed are often the objects of the elderly person's care and concern. Instead, the Eriksons pointed to the need to transcend the concrete reality of one's own progeny to embrace all the generations of children that are as yet unborn.

Joanna Macy, in *Healing the Wounds*, addresses the need to begin the process of ego transcendence at an earlier stage of life and in an even more inclusive manner than that depicted by the Eriksons. She sees an "ecological selfhood" emerging that allows us to transcend separateness and fragmentation. In her opinion, one of the key questions of our time is whether we can transcend the personal ego in such a way as to foster a transcendence of the cultural, religious, and species egos as well.

A negative reading of Peck's challenge to transcend our egos might suggest a diminishment of the individual. Looked at from a positive perspective, however, it may not be so much a diminishment as a release into a higher level of differentiation and integration. In this view, ego transcendence is not the dissolution of the individual ego but its opening into a larger sense of identity—one in which the concern for personal survival is less weighty than the concern for cosmic survival.

#### **CARING, COMPASSION, AND WISDOM**

Just as the Eriksons chose caring as the virtue characteristic of grand-generativity, several of the ecofeminist writers cite compassion as the virtue needed in old age, and the Buddhists speak of the "boundless heart" through which this great compassion flows. The Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess, speaking from the perspective of "deep ecology," noted that as we transcend our individual egos, overcoming our alienation from the rest of creation, "the requisite care flows naturally if the self is widened and deepened so that protection of nature is felt and perceived as protection of ourselves."

It is fitting, then, as we prepare to birth our elderly selves, that we recognize the value of the final devel-



opmental stage of life. Old age needs to be seen not merely for its contribution to the development of our individual selves but also for the potential it holds for us—probably the most educated group of people to age thus far—to pass along something of supreme importance to those behind us.

If we are willing to birth and grow into our elderly selves and to deal effectively with the task of ego transcendence, we have the potential to launch ourselves on a process of self-realization in which the self to be actualized extends farther and deeper—well beyond the separate ego that we are accustomed to viewing as our individual self—until it includes more and more of the phenomenal world. This shift in identification is essential to our survival—not as concrete, separate selves but as members of the human race, which is one small strand of the ecological web and which must be viewed in conjunction with all the other strands of that web, with which it is interdependent for survival—the animals, fish, plants, soil, water, air, and the cosmos itself.

To come to this self-transcendence, to speak it out and teach it to the generations following us, is to awaken to an increase of power beyond our capacities as separate entities. It is to open doors, to develop new possibilities, to offer new responses, to connect with the various elements of the cosmos in ways that have been insufficiently recognized in the past. Thus, it is fitting that at this time of ecological

crisis, particular attention be paid to the developmental challenges of grand-generativity and self-transcendence. Together, they lay the psychological foundation for a spirituality of caring, compassion, and wisdom. These virtues, so intimately associated with the birthing of the elderly self, are the very virtues our world sorely needs at the present time. If we seek to develop them within ourselves and transmit them to others, they will stand as our legacy and our gift to the world as they help foster its future.

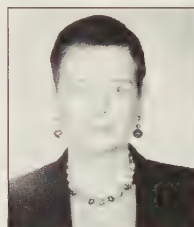
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# The Yeas Have It

*James Torrens, S.J.*

## Pentecost

Let the fire forge us  
and the diversities  
assume one tongue,  
the high wind get in under  
our door to whip up embers.

Ah, if we halfway knew,  
or could read the visage  
of each ho-hum moment.

Where were we up to now  
when summoned to excel?  
Listening to crows caw,

or in the pop-up shops  
of readers and advisors,  
palm out, paying  
to see around the bend.

Now the commissioning.  
Lit by gospel scenes  
and flat as a laid sword  
we hear saints invoked.  
We stand to in our whites,  
happy to speak up.

**O**n Wednesday afternoons I do some hospital visiting, after the example of Jesuit novices who live with us and do it all week long. Half of the patients are HIV-positive, and many have AIDS, so you find them feverish or huddled tight or barely coherent. They muster the best welcome they can, and one attends to them the best one can.

Among even the sickest of the sick, though, every so often, you meet shining spirits—people just waiting to be prayed with, inquiring how you are before you can ask how they are. You may get from them a fervorino about God's unfailing care, a tale of blessings received after a life on the streets. Apply just the slightest pressure and out come the praises of Jesus Christ. The pastoral minister is awed at these moments. You came to give, and here you are receiving—often from those in correctional custody.

Catholic hospital or not, my first guess about these souls is "*Evangelicos*, *Pentecostals*." Usually, I am right (there are still plenty of fervent Catholics, but quieter). Here are men and women who may be under a death sentence, yet this does not diminish their sparkle. They are determined to fight for life, but trustful of what lies beyond. It is uncanny. One goes out of their rooms buoyed up.

Can more of us be this way? I know the caveats: that their religion is too otherworldly, alienating



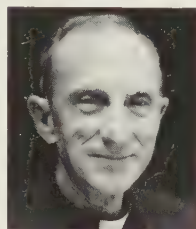
them from the earthly struggle; that their enthusiasm has a fanatical glitter. In their presence it is hard to think this way. I find myself wishing for the same conviction and joy, to be just as expansive and full of God. "Your brother here was dead, and behold he lives," your sister too—that is what such moments say.

Among religious of my own order, I have found this excitement of rediscovery, this relief in getting life back, most often among recovered alcoholics (among charismatics too, but they are fewer). Just think, though. The Pentecostal gift is for all the baptized. That virtue of bold initiative, the hallmark of born-again believers giving testimony, was also the mark of the earliest apostles. The *Acts of the Apostles* pretty much coined a word for it—*parresia* (full confidence).

This upbeat spirit characterized the early Christians, who "took their meal together with happiness and simplicity of heart" (Acts 2:46). That it can sometimes be naive, that it can be mimicked but never really forced, that some temperaments will remain low-key when excited, that struggle and dark days

and uncertainty mark the normal path to faith—all of this is true. Most welcome, nonetheless, are those whose generosity and gratefulness to God are transparent, overflowing. They are those, time after time, in whom much has been forgiven—drugs, crimes, abortions, whatever. And now they love much.

I myself cannot go away from this topic without a sentence of Saint Paul's ringing in my ears (it often does). Exegetes, can there really be doubt that this sentence of Second Timothy is truly Paul's voice? "I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; for God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-control" (1, 6–7).



Father James Torrens, S.J., is an associate editor of *America*.

## Vitamin E Needs More Research

**E**nthusiastic proponents of the use of vitamin E as a dietary supplement have gained scientific support from several research projects recently. Acclaimed as the most promising antidote for heart disease, cancer, and premature aging of the body, alpha-tocopherol (the vitamin's chemical name) is taken daily by most of the researchers who are investigating its medicinal benefits.

One recent study produced evidence that men with existing heart disease who added vitamin E to their daily diet for two years slowed the progress of atherosclerosis. Another study involving people with vascular disease showed that taking the vitamin along with aspirin every day was more effective than taking aspirin alone in staving off heart attacks and strokes by inhibiting clotting of the blood. Other research found that elderly persons who use vitamin E as a supplement to their ordinary diet experience an improvement in their

body's ability to fight infections by increasing the function of the immune mechanism that supplies white blood cells for the combat.

Vitamin E is available in doses ranging from 100 to 1,000 international units (IU). The *New York Times* has reported that most evidence suggests that 400 IU daily is probably the most beneficial supplementary dose. An excessive intake of vitamin E can interfere with normal blood clotting, which can result in bleeding problems. High blood pressure is an additional risk.

Because there has never been a double-blind study of vitamin E's efficacy in the treatment of a large number of people over a period of several years, some degree of hesitancy about adding it to one's diet shows wisdom. After all, in large doses this vitamin is considered to be a drug, not a nutrient—and all drugs have some side effects. It is therefore advisable to talk with one's physician before starting to use it.



# Stages in a Celibate's Life

*Reverend Bernard R. Bonnot, Ph.D.*

**I** miss having kids," a young priest said to his companion at a recent convocation of priests. "Thank God I don't have any," said a slightly older companion in response, "but I sometimes wonder whether I am giving all I can to life." "It's a great life," mused a third, slightly paunchy pastor, "but I sure wish I had someone with whom I could share it." These three priests, all celibate, are living different celibacies.

Committed celibacy is one lifestyle manifestation of a self-gift to God. Sacramental marriage is another. While debate about the wisdom of both mandated celibacy and divorceless marriage continues, celibates need meaning to persist, and those considering celibacy need motivation to pursue it.

Celibacy is, for each of us living it, an individual and unique journey heavily conditioned by personality, identity, background, and situation. But the experience is somewhat shared. We can learn from one another. And in these challenging times, we must.

Various stage theories about human life provide one context for such sharing. The arts have long depicted the "ages" of the life cycle: childhood, youth, maturity, and old age. The prominence of psychology in our own century has made it common to discuss life and its challenges in terms of stages. Because the experience of celibacy changes as one ages, the

celibate journey lends itself to "staging." A person who commits to a celibate life will in fact live several different celibacies. What subdivisions of the celibate journey might illuminate the path and prove helpful to those who walk it?

In stage theory, each stage has a distinctive challenge that persists throughout life. It is prominent in one moment, recessive in another, but always in play. Each stage requires the resolution of its associated challenge, and the resolution achieved carries through into subsequent stages with greater or lesser strength. Life goes on, however we have done. Thus, we learn our ABCs more or less well, and live with the resultant literacy until we die. In subsequent years, earlier challenges may resurface with new strength, requiring renewed attention and possibly better resolution. Ignatius Loyola, for example, went back to school as a mature man to learn better his ABCs. So can it be with celibacy. One's early resolution of its challenge may require reworking later.

Erik Erikson distinguishes stages in terms of specific dilemmas to be resolved and needs to be managed. The resolution of each dilemma has a distinctive outcome, positive or negative. Erikson's approach suggests that each stage of celibacy is associated with a distinct dilemma, requires specific strengths for resolution, and cultivates particular



virtues. The latter enable the challenge of celibacy to be lived thereafter with success and satisfaction. I shall follow Erikson loosely, distinguishing four stages of celibacy, starting with adolescence.

## ADOLESCENT CELIBACY

Adolescence in celibacy runs from puberty into the twenties. Its challenges are (1) to develop a vision of life in a celibate mode as worth living and (2) to negotiate the physical pressures of adolescent sexuality in a way that allows one to conceive commitment to celibate life—a difficult task in our self-indulgent and hypersexual culture. This stage corresponds roughly to Erikson's identity stage.

While sexuality is at play from infancy on, it becomes a matter of personal concern when hormones begin to flow and one's body demands decisions. In adolescence, the central issue is how one handles physical urges, emotional cravings, imaginative fantasies, and deep-seated psychological desires. Contemporary American culture generally presumes that one's sexual urges are to be indulged. For those not comfortable with that assumption, there is the popular stance that sexual impulses ought to be controlled, although they aren't likely to be. Accordingly, current secular wisdom prescribes safety in the form of condoms for boys and abortions for girls. The law, the media, social policies, and parental attitudes all seem to conspire in this direction. Given these circumstances, celibacy hardly has a chance—although it may emerge, as in Saint Augustine, as a reaction to the libertinism that surrounds it and seemingly prevails.

In some quarters—mainly Catholic and conservative Christian ones—the stance on sexual urges is that they definitely should be controlled. Abstinence is promoted, chastity is considered the ideal, and celibacy is a possible (though usually temporary) option.

The personal drama of whether to be sexually active or not is played out daily among America's adolescents. The further dimensions of that basic dilemma follow (e.g., to be active alone, with another, with many others, with the same or the opposite gender or both). The first stage of celibacy requires a resolution of these dilemmas by not acting on sexual urges at all. One's grasp of human bodiliness and the meaning of sexuality must allow for the possibility of this decision within the context of a psychologically balanced life. Without such a resolution of the dilemma, one cannot long remain sexually inactive, much less commit oneself to lifelong celibacy.

Those who do not negotiate the adolescent challenge in a way that allows for this option will have to renegotiate their whole perspective at a later time, as

did Augustine, if they are to accept the celibate possibility and decide to live it. The many young people who have successfully waited until marriage to become sexually active—together with the young clerics, religious, and laity who have committed themselves to celibacy and who live it honorably—attest to the possibility of success in negotiating this stage of celibate life. The strength that derives from its successful resolution is physical celibacy.

## GENERATIVE CELIBACY

During the celibate's twenties and early thirties, the dominant challenge is to come to practical psychological terms with the lack of (1) a "life partner" and offspring, at a time when most of one's peers are defining their lives in those terms; and (2) such things as a home of one's own, which enables the young adult in America to know that he or she is progressing, growing, maturing. While Erikson proposes intimacy as the next challenge after identity, these celibate years have more to do with generativity.

The second stage of celibate life is constituted around the need to decide about paternity/maternity. Successful resolution of the first stage enables one to commit to a celibate life, but once embarked on the journey, this further challenge arises.

The person who decides to be sexually active looks for a partner. Often the search is for a physical rather than a psychological partner. This leads to later separation and divorce in many cases. In our culture, the person who opts for sexual activity and chooses a partner is generally constrained to marry that partner, or at least to share a household with him or her. In either case, the psyche faces the challenge of intimacy—of actually coming to terms with another person and making space in one's own cocoon for that other. Children may or may not enter the equation.

The committed celibate, on the other hand, conducts no search for a physical partner and avoids the type of companionship that is likely to bring forth the issue of sexual involvement. In early adulthood, the celibate tends to be absorbed in the pursuit of the education and training required to permanently enter the community he or she has chosen as the context for living a meaningful, sexually inactive life.

Until thirty years ago, the settings of formation for a celibate life reduced the challenges of intimacy by forbidding exclusive friendships and restricting family contacts. Today finds more openness to these dimensions in the aspirant's life, but systematic assistance in the integration of close friends and even family into celibate living is exceptional even today. This illustrates that clerical and religious cultures are open to the dynamics of human relationship in celibate life



but unskilled and uncertain about what to do with them. In any case, young adults pursuing celibate life generally do not face the deep challenge of intimacy. The same may be true even of older candidates.

The young priest or religious moving into ministry is likely to be engaged quickly by young families with children or to encounter earlier-life companions in the company of their children. At some point this evokes in the now maturing celibate an awareness that the years of generating children are limited and that if one is ever going to contribute to the human community in that way, "now is the time." The primary prompting here is neither physical nor psychological but comparative and mortal. The general sense in our culture that one should have children by the age of 40 (especially in women, but valid also for many men), if at all, is part of it. Realizing that the years of generating children are passing rapidly is perhaps one of our earliest intimations of mortality. It is a personal and rather solitary awakening. Erikson's stage of generativity in its full dimension is not the issue, for his dynamic is deeper and broader than the mere generation of offspring.

The celibate's dilemma is comparative. It derives from visiting parish families and/or one's siblings, seeing their homes as the settings within which they are raising children who are full of life, and realizing that the generators of that life are no older than oneself, perhaps even younger. When the celibate returns to the rectory or convent (or, today, possibly apartment or cabin), he or she may feel empty and insignificant. This experience may prompt the celibate to want children of his or her own. This challenges the meaning and value of the celibate commitment.

Resolution of this stage requires that the celibate accept more deeply the radical individuality and mortality of his or her existence. The celibate must realize that the choice of celibacy entails not only sexual inactivity but the lack of generativity. That may have been a thought before; it is an ache now. It may hurt so much that the individual has to revisit the commitment, arguing that he or she never realized what giving up childbearing meant. Resolution of this crisis forces the celibate toward Erikson's generativity in its fuller meaning: assuming responsibility not just for the generation and nurturance of one's own offspring but also for the community as a whole, for the life and education and well-being of the next generation and all future generations, for the culture, for faith-hope-love on the planet, for the church, for the Kingdom. At this stage, the celibate must accept the fact that celibacy is not only sexual inactivity but also paternal/maternal inactivity. It is continence and barrenness, and to that the celibate freely, and eventually happily, says yes.

Happy and vital young adult priests and religious in parishes and institutions across the country witness to the continuing possibility of success in negotiating celibate life during these years. The virtue deriving from successful resolution of this stage is generative celibacy.

In the adolescent stage, when physical celibacy is the challenge, others are a factor as potential partners in physical sexuality. In early adulthood, others of the opposite gender are a factor as potential partners in parenting. In both instances, others are not the focus of the decision that typically must be made. But in the next stage, others as individual persons become the crux of the celibate challenge.

## INTIMATE CELIBACY

The years between the mid-thirties and the mid-to-late fifties challenge a celibate to come to practical terms with (1) the need to share one's inner life with other persons for whom one cares and (2) the consequent desire to enter into intimate companionship with such individuals. This development has much to do with Erikson's intimacy stage.

The challenge here is the want/desire/need of the celibate for companionship, some one(s) with whom to share life daily. The issue is not sex, not children and family; the issue is intimacy. At this stage of life (generally one's forties and fifties), when Erikson would perceive most persons as dealing with the issue of generativity in the deeper sense, the celibate must come to terms with his or her aloneness, solitariness, and perhaps isolation. The issue is not loneliness, which is a universal human experience; nor is it solitude, which the praying celibate has presumably found to be a positive dimension of life. The issue is the realization that one's person and one's life are not shared intimately with anyone else, and this condition is felt to be a great privation. It can seem an unnecessary one, even a senseless condition that needlessly delimits oneself and renders one shallow.

As one matures, one realizes that the most precious reality on earth is personhood. One desires to share one's personhood, in its fullness and depth, with others—and wants others to do so too. And one learns that this is a rare and costly achievement. One sees that however rich is the experience of meaningful sharing with many—in parish or school, presbyterate or community, even the Eucharist—ultimate intimacy is person to person, one to one, or at most, one to few, as in a family—as in the Trinity. And the celibate, in mature adulthood, must often face the fact that he or she does not live such intimacy.

In earlier stages, the practicalities of celibacy and/or its idealism make sense and support the com-



mitment made. People who are sexually active must assume responsibility for partners and potential children and must have an economic base that enables them to meet such consequences. These same factors play out in favor of celibacy as one struggles through the crisis of wanting a family. The celibate can recognize that the demands of spouse and children would be very difficult to balance with the requirements of religious life as he or she has experienced it to that point. Early in their ministry, most celibates throw themselves totally into the requirements of their role. It absorbs everything they are willing to give—and, at times, more than they can wisely afford.

But in the stage of mature adulthood, when intimacy is the challenge, the practicalities are not as persuasive and supportive of the celibate decision. Indeed, they may argue in favor of the opposite. One has become comfortable with one's own body and does not fear it but appreciates it as something powerfully good, even if sexually inactive. One has learned that intimacy does not require sexual expression, even if it yearns for it at times. One has come to terms with one's age and has accepted the decision not to have a family. One has perceived the deeper and more significant generativity one's life can have—and perhaps has even tasted some of the goodness of being so generative or has been recognized for it. One knows the requirements of ministry and has learned to manage them in a balanced way. And in the midst of all this, one possesses a profound desire for intimacy, coupled with a sense that it can be had without threatening continence, dedication to ministry, or communion with God. In fact, one senses that opening to the intimacy of companionship enhances the celibate and the quality of his or her celibacy. The ability to welcome others into one's life and to share day-to-day existence with them does not force a retraction of the commitment but enables a more meaningful and personally generous living of it.

For many, this is the most challenging stage of celibacy and the one most difficult to negotiate within current church structures. For if the celibate is no longer warned about intimate friendships, he or she is still not helped much to live them by the ecclesial and ecclesiastical context. Mature adulthood is a place where we still have much to learn. It is a stage in which celibacy has suffered massive casualties.

If successful negotiation of adolescence results in physical celibacy (an ability to be wholly human without being sexually active and without feeling distracted or frustrated), and if successful negotiation of early adulthood issues results in generative celibacy (an ability to be productive and responsible without

becoming a parent and/or feeling deprived or incomplete), the successful negotiation of mature adulthood should result in intimate celibacy—an ability to be a life-sharing friend of others without being married and without violating one's self-gift to God, either physically or psychologically.

## INTEGRAL CELIBACY

The years between the late fifties and retirement or death challenge the celibate (1) to maintain meaning and hope when the summation of one's contribution to the human community is increasingly near; (2) to come to terms not only with the question of uselessness now but also with the usefulness of the whole; (3) to find reason to push on as one's friends and peers retire or die; and (4) to feel personal worth and significance when there is no one intimately present with whom one has shared it all and/or with whom to strike out in new directions, nor anyone to care for or to depend on for care. This stage corresponds to Erikson's eighth and final stage, that of wisdom.

As our population ages, the field of gerontology is distinguishing a raft of challenges facing the elderly. The celibate too should anticipate some new crises at this point, even if he or she has negotiated the earlier challenges more or less successfully. In one's senior years, the dilemmas faced during earlier struggles can still be provoked. An uncle of mine, a Jesuit priest until his death from cancer and a veteran of twenty-four years in the missionary fields of India, once told me the story of a young Jesuit asking an old Jesuit when the struggle with celibacy would get easier. "When you get to be about 60," replied the older Jesuit, himself in his mid-sixties. Just then, a beautiful woman walked past the bench on which the two were sitting. "Better make that 70," the older man said. And the older I get, the more that story rings true.

The senior years surely bring special challenges for celibates. One major factor is whether they continue to have reasons to contribute to life. A person who is a spouse, parent, and grandparent has a continuing physical bond with life as it unfolds in new generations. Celibates lack that connection and so may feel dissociated, tired, done. Those who have lived celibacy as an institutional requirement but are now not institutionally needed will, I think, lack reasons to stay involved with life. They will at best plod on as occasional functionaries or wither away on golf courses or in retirement homes.

On the other hand, those who have lived celibacy meaningfully at every stage are more likely to face the challenges to celibacy in their final years with an understanding of the profound meaning and worth



of their lives, and they will positively cherish their new experiences, including new opportunities to share that wisdom. Such persons will remain present to the community. They will stay involved physically, generatively, and intimately, with a creative potency that will crown their lives and bring great blessing to the people with whom they share.

Pope John XXIII and Mother Teresa, together with thousands of retired priests and religious, witness the possibility of success in negotiating this stage of celibate life. Their lives question the isolation of celibate retirees (even before they need special care) from the pastoral fields through which they have walked and in which they have grown into full celibate personhood. Such isolation seems less than the best context for helping old celibates live out this final stage of their lives. The strength or virtue deriving from a successful handling of this stage can be called integral celibacy.

### A LIFELONG EFFORT

Anyone considering a commitment to lifelong celibacy will do well, today more than ever, to face as fully as possible its lifelong dynamics and to give it ongoing reflection. To do less is to proceed naively and to subject a precious (if battered) ideal to unmerited risk. For celibacy is not a one-time decision. Considering celibacy in terms of stages enables such probing preview and lifelong review.

Maturity in celibacy is a matter of achieving the virtue of each stage and all stages. Mastering any one dimension of the challenge is not to be fully celibate. There is more to celibacy than being sexually inactive, unmarried, barren, living alone, or all these conditions together. Each stage requires its own special motivation and has its own rationale. Our lives have to make sense to us if we are to have them make sense to others and survive the challenges to our chosen way. Because the challenges shift as we age, the rationale that makes sense is likely to shift also. Thus, to live celibacy well is to undergo continual conversion.

When celibacy is experienced predominantly as a burdensome cross, the burden is often not so much its requirements in themselves as it is the lack of a sufficiently motivating rationale for living the celibate life. A lack of inner support makes the "cross" unbearable. Knowing the source of celibacy's weight at any given stage can help us find meaning to offset its gravity. The meanings that sustain us at one stage, like bricks in a building of enduring worth, may need serious repointing at another stage if they are to re-

tain their value. In our era, meanings that arise from our inner experience as human beings may carry more motivational weight than meanings that derive from scripture ("eunuchs for the kingdom of God," one eventually learns, is not about celibacy) or tradition (arguments for the "apostolic origins" of clerical celibacy may intrigue for a while, but they are not conclusive or compelling) or discipline (institutional policies and requirements do not adequately motivate personal behavior over a lifetime, although they may provide helpful reinforcement at stress points along the way).

I have written from the perspective of a 52-year-old diocesan priest. I consider myself to be in the mature adulthood stage of life, in which the dominant challenge is the need for intimate sharing in a celibate mode and the consequent desire for a lifestyle that will allow the kind of companionship associated with such sharing. I conceive myself to have passed through the prior two stages with some success, some weakness. I can only project myself into senior adulthood and its challenges. I share these reflections in the hope that they might be helpful to others, especially my brothers in the diocesan priesthood.

Worthwhile as I believe such analysis as mine to be, the key driving force, in and through all the stages of my celibate journey, has been and remains the person of Jesus. A chief reason for being celibate—and often, for me, the only finally motivating one—is that Jesus was celibate. That works especially well until one is about 33 years old—after which one increasingly faces the argument that Jesus never had to live through the challenges we face.

Then again, perhaps Jesus faced and negotiated all the same challenges. While I can identify no clear assertions of Jesus' physical celibacy, the gospels and tradition presume it while providing rich evidence of the generativity, intimacy, and wisdom of his celibate life. The examples of Mary and Joseph, Paul and John, and the legions of honorable celibates through the ages can also be helpful. But these individuals ultimately inspire mainly in their following of Jesus, *the* celibate.



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# Sexual Dynamics in Ministry Relationships

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**A** pastoral counselor becomes uneasy about her counselee's growing dependence on her. A newly ordained associate is startled by his preoccupying fantasies about a youth in the parish. A pastor is the recipient of sudden displays of affection from a parishioner who makes references to "our friendship" and "all you mean to me."

Ministers can be taken by surprise when sexual dynamics surface in their relationships with the people they serve. Emotions in minister-parishioner relationships can become more intense than one might expect, and these feelings can take on a sexual tone. A dangerous consequence can be confusion about how to maintain a healthy relationship. Subsequent "boundary violations" are harmful for the parishioner.

The presence of sexual dynamics in ministerial relationships is relevant to all of us in ministry. Sexual reactions are not a sign of pathology; they exist in the healthiest of professionals. The purpose of this article is to help the minister recognize sexual dynamics and become more alert to managing the boundaries in his or her professional relationships.

The term *parishioner* is used throughout this article to avoid such awkward neologisms as *ministree* or *helpee*. The term is intended to refer to any recipient of spiritual ministry, whether in or outside a parish context. Most of the examples used here concern

female parishioners; in minister-parishioner relationships, women are more often the victims of boundary violations than men.

## TRANSFERENCE AND COUNTERTRANSFERENCE

Traditional psychology gives us an easy place to start. The field of psychotherapy offers two useful concepts for understanding what happens between any significant authority figure, such as a minister, and the person who turns to this authority figure for help. These are the concepts of transference and countertransference.

Transference refers to the dynamic of transferring feelings, expectations, and behaviors from earlier parent-child relationships to current pseudoparental relations. For instance, a boy who learned to be submissive at all times to demanding parents becomes an adult who is consistently submissive to his boss. A woman who learned early in life not to trust her father has difficulty later trusting any man to whom she gets close. Or, having learned that she can always climb on Daddy's knee for comfort, a woman "knows" that she can always count on support from the man she loves.

The more emotionally intense the relationship, the more likely the transference. Transference is an



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## Transference is increased in minister-parishioner relationships because of the esteem in which people hold "holy ones"

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important concept in the minister-parishioner relationship because of the emotional intensity of moments when parishioners are most in need of their pastor's assistance: a child is dying; a marriage is failing; a depression is deepening. When a woman turns to her pastor for reassurance and comfort, transference theory predicts that she may come to feel this reassurance very strongly, to feel an intimacy and intensity that may be rooted more in her childhood than in the actual words of comfort from her pastor. This intensification of feelings toward the caring minister is common.

Transference is also increased in the ministerial relationship because of the esteem in which people hold "holy ones." Priests, sisters, and brothers often inspire awe through their dedicated and mysterious way of life. If such an exceptional person looks on a parishioner with tenderness and compassion, that parishioner may feel especially touched. Consciously, he or she may experience a new appreciation of God's tenderness and compassion. Unconsciously, he or she may become a child who is finally being held in the arms of a parent—and wants more. The parishioner has fallen in love with being loved, but thinks that he or she has fallen in love with the minister.

Countertransference refers to a therapist's (or minister's) similar transference of early feelings into the helping relationship. Countertransference intensifies and confuses the actual objective interaction. As personal needs enter the relationship, the minister begins to lose clear insight. A pastoral counselor's desire for a close mother-daughter relationship (maybe based on her own close childhood relationship with her mother, or lack thereof) may cause her to be

overprotective toward younger women parishioners who approach her. A young priest feeling the loneliness of his first assignment can easily persuade himself that an attractive parishioner's adulation of him is true love.

A young woman religious in campus ministry became enthralled with a Newman organization member her own age. He in turn was enamored of her. They began meeting for movies and long talks. Other collegians became resentful. Friends confronted her, but she was blind to the impact on the other students being served. This is an example of the minister's own needs intruding into what should be a professional relationship. The man and woman involved might indeed have been well suited to each other, but the attempt to mix business with pleasure resulted in professional problems. The minister's needs (countertransference) blinded her to her professional responsibilities. This may also be an example of transference on the part of the student; his feelings may have been intensified by the young woman's impressive parental position.

While transference and countertransference refer to a broader spectrum of behaviors than sexuality alone, sex is certainly part of the picture. This is so because intense emotions can often translate into sexual feelings. Loneliness, vulnerability, and tenderness especially stir our sexual longings. Also, some transference and countertransference feelings are of a sexual nature to begin with. Ministers should expect to encounter sexual reactions (in themselves and in others) in the course of their work.

The dynamics of transference and countertransference are real and powerful. The feelings involved cannot be totally avoided. A minister should consider himself or herself neither a failure for having such feelings nor a success for pretending to avoid them. Such pretense is self-deceiving. Rather, success or failure should be measured by how well one can identify these dynamics and refrain from destructive behaviors. Experience, training, and supervision all help one become more astute in reading the presence of such forces in any professional relationship.

### BOUNDARY VIOLATIONS

Transference and countertransference explain why ministers might be susceptible to sexual reactions, but we have not yet addressed the consequences of acting on such feelings. Two firm principles must guide our discussion here: (1) the professional is always the responsible person, and (2) sexual activity between professional and parishioner is always abusive to the latter.



In any professional relationship, the professional is always the one responsible for “boundary violations.” Marilyn Peterson’s book *At Personal Risk: Boundary Violations in Professional-Client Relationships* puts the minister’s role in a helpful ethical context. Peterson recalls the ancient cultural role of the shaman—the wise healer and judge, an attendant to physical health and a guide to the spiritual world. In modern Western culture, the shaman role is divided among five professional groups: physicians, attorneys, teachers, psychotherapists, and clergy. Many of us turn to these professionals with total trust: we expose our naked bodies to the physician, open our minds to the teacher, and reveal our deepest secrets to the lawyer, therapist, and priest. We give these individuals the “professional privilege” to cross the usual boundaries of social protocol and to enter our lives in unusually intimate ways.

This professional privilege results in vulnerability on the part of the client, student, or parishioner. An adolescent penitent, for example, confesses an embarrassing sexual sin. He puts himself at the mercy of the priest not to reveal his sin to anyone else. Emotionally, he also trusts in the shamanic wisdom of the priest, and so he is vulnerable to any emotional abuse the priest may inflict on him, such as a demeaning chastisement. In the worst-case scenario, the penitent is vulnerable to the priest’s taking sexual advantage of him, now that the priest knows his weaknesses.

The imbalance of power between the professional and the recipient of help is significant. Because of the professional’s privilege and the recipient’s vulnerability, the professional carries an ethical responsibility to safeguard the tenuous boundaries in this unusual relationship. Codes of ethics for each profession define the limits of a well-ordered professional relationship. The ethical code of the American Psychological Association, for example, includes directives that the clinician maintain strict confidentiality, not engage in therapy with a member of his or her own family, and not enter into business deals with a client. It would be helpful for churches to articulate the code of ethics assumed in the minister-parishioner relationship.

## SEX IN THE FORBIDDEN ZONE

The second principle of boundary protection concerns the abusive nature of sexual activity in a professional relationship. Sexual activity between a professional and the recipient of his or her care is always damaging to the latter. This principle is based on the power differential already discussed. Consent to sexual activity can never be free or mutual when the parishioner is under the powerful influence of

transference feelings. In spite of how “equal” the two parties may feel in their emotional attraction to one another, and no matter how much the parishioner may desire or even initiate the seduction, the relationship is not equal, and the parishioner is not free.

In fact, at the transference level, the relationship parallels that between a parent and child; any sexual activity between the two parties thus has a quasi-incestuous dimension. On this level, the parishioner is submitting unconsciously to the overwhelming pressure of a child’s desire to surrender to whatever the loving father/mother figure asks. Damage follows. Afterward, the “child” may feel guilty for feeling any resistance to or revulsion at what the parental figure asked. On a more conscious level, the same parishioner may feel guilty about cooperating. The parishioner’s mind makes a great effort to understand the act as acceptable, to see the authority figure as good, and to take the blame for any wrongdoing in the relationship.

Peter Rutter, M.D., has addressed the problem of physical intimacy in professional relationships in his book *Sex in the Forbidden Zone: When Men in Power—Therapists, Doctors, Clergy, Teachers, and Others—Betray Women’s Trust*. In his research, Rutter repeatedly observed the psychological consequences of a woman engaging in sexual activity with her therapist, doctor, lawyer, or minister. Often she felt used and resentful about the sexual activity, but she also felt responsible. Unaware of the power that transference could exert, she saw herself as having freely chosen activity that went against her moral code. She was thrown into confusion. Serious consequences resulted: guilt, shame, long-term depression, distrust of other authority figures (including church figures), confusion about sexuality, confusion about herself, and the need for expensive therapy. While Rutter focused on the male professional and the female recipient of care, most of his observations are applicable to any gender combination.

Much research has been conducted regarding psychotherapists’ sexual involvement. In anonymous surveys, 3.6 to 12.2 percent of male therapists and 0.2 to 3.0 percent of female therapists admitted to having had sexual involvement with a patient at some time. (The percentages vary partly because recent figures are considerably lower than those of a dozen years ago—perhaps as a result of increased education and litigation.) Research on the effects of therapist-patient sexual involvement confirms Rutter’s findings. Patients consistently show harmful effects, including ambivalence, guilt, sexual confusion, impaired ability to trust, emotional instability, suppressed rage, increased suicidal risk, and

cognitive dysfunctions (e.g., poor concentration, nightmares, flashbacks). Professionals who have dealt with the aftermath of minister-parishioner involvement are observing similar fallout.

## ONE'S OWN SEXUALITY

Anyone assuming a professional role in relation to a parishioner should be aware of his or her own sexual dynamics, alert to how his or her affective behavior is perceived by others, and sensitive to seductive behavior in others.

All of us have sexual reactions. In a survey of more than 500 psychotherapists, 87 percent (95 percent of men and 76 percent of women) reported being sexually attracted to their clients at least on occasion, and many (63 percent) felt guilty, anxious, or confused about this attraction. Ministers probably have similar reactions to the parishioners with whom they work most closely.

Some ministers-in-training would prefer not to address their sexual reactions; ignoring sexuality altogether and keeping such feelings repressed makes celibacy easier; many assume. But repression actually makes ministry more dangerous. Any of us entrusted with the powerful role of a modern-day shaman should be well attuned to our own inner stirrings. We need to be ruthlessly honest with ourselves about our needs, fantasies, and temptations.

A "fortysomething" woman, distraught over her loveless marriage, had been in counseling with an associate pastor for several months. The young, inexperienced priest was warm and caring in his remarks. During one session the woman said, "You know, Father, I've finally realized how I can cope with having to have sex with Fred. . . . When I am with him, Father, I think of you in his place." With a fumbling response, the young priest cut short the session and almost shoved the parishioner out the rectory door. He was not prepared to handle her fantasy or the threat that it posed for him.

Seminary and initial formation should help the beginner answer some hard questions: How comfortable and confident am I about my sexuality? What are my vulnerabilities? What is my sexual orientation? What are my attractions, my turn-ons? How much does alcohol weaken me? Where do I find the emotional support and celibate intimacy to keep myself healthy?

After formation, it would be helpful for ministers to continue to seek the assistance of others in recognizing their personal needs. Reporting to another keeps one honest. This accountability can be obtained through spiritual direction, ongoing supervision, personal therapy, or a serious-minded support

group. Such regular consultation sets the stage for seeking help when one encounters a parishioner toward whom one's affections are particularly confusing.

## PERCEPTIONS OF AFFECTION

A second area that calls for attentiveness is others' perceptions of one's affections. Good ministers are warm, caring individuals. By their very personalities, they give parishioners a glimpse of God's love. So how can they prevent being misunderstood in their affections? How can they prevent a hurting parishioner from saying, "But I thought there was something special between us?"

When a too-spontaneous spiritual director puts his arm around his directee's shoulders as they part at the end of a session, how does she feel? Close? Affirmed? That she has performed well, and Father approves? That she has performed well, and Father is making a pass at her?

A woman religious expressed much pain during a retreat interview. At the conclusion of the meeting, the retreat director moved to hug her to express his care and concern. She recoiled from the impending physical contact. It was only in a subsequent meeting that the director learned that she had been the victim of sexual abuse; his "innocent" advances felt very inappropriate to her. He had not anticipated the meaning of this gesture in the woman's life history.

We live today in a climate of scandal and litigation. Children are being trained to be suspicious of touches from adults—teachers, strangers, even parents. Churchgoers have become suspicious of their pastors' affections. As a regrettable result of such trends, many ministers are becoming afraid to display any affection toward their parishioners. It will be unfortunate if the current social climate produces a generation of overly inhibited men and women serving the church. Ministers must be cautioned not to withhold all signs of love but to be conscious of the psychological dynamics at play when one uses physical gestures or affectionate words to show warmth.

Touches and hugs make for unclear boundaries in our churches today, at least in Anglo cultures. In some cultures, or with some individuals, the parishioner would feel rejected if he or she did not receive some physical touch from the minister. For others, touch is rare and easily misunderstood. One practical guideline is for the minister not to initiate such gestures but to respond when parishioners reach out to them spontaneously. By following the parishioners' cues, the minister may sort out which gestures are comfortable for which parishioners.



## SEDUCTIVE BEHAVIOR IN OTHERS

The minister should be sensitive to seductive behavior displayed by others. The term *seduction* is used broadly here to refer to the process of getting another to notice and become attracted to one. It is an invitational style, whether blatant or subtle. Seduction is a common dynamic in people's ways of relating to one another. It has its strongest impact when it elicits a sexual response on the part of another.

A parishioner can unconsciously make moves to get the minister particularly interested in him or her. Motivations may be varied. Perhaps a parishioner is sexually attracted to the new associate, or perhaps she is simply uncomfortable until she has every man in her life emotionally "hooked" on her. In either case, a parishioner can get noticed by making subtle compliments, shows of sensitivity, offers to help—all socially acceptable gestures of support for the new associate, but extended with the (often unconscious) goal of seduction.

Even children can behave seductively in this sense. Every child wants Father's or Sister's love. The appeal for attention may or may not have a sexual tone to it; the child is only behaving in whatever way has brought attention at home.

It would be an overreaction for the minister to pull back in fear each time a parishioner showed a little friendliness. Sensitivity to seduction means sensitivity to the difference between a spontaneous show of appreciation for the pastor and an entrapping maneuver. Awareness of the possibility of seduction will lessen the likelihood of the minister's becoming confused by his or her emotional response to a seductive invitation. The minister needs to recognize such dynamics so as to maintain perspective on the real nature of the professional relationship. His or her internal responses can then be managed more realistically.

## RESPONSIBILITY RESIDES IN MINISTER

Sexual dynamics are present in every professional relationship. The minister can best manage them by

remaining aware of his or her own sexual dynamics, by being attentive to how his or her affective behavior is perceived, and by being sensitive to the possibility of seductive behavior in others. Protection of proper sexual boundaries is the responsibility of the minister because the professional is always the responsible party, and sexual activity between professional and parishioner is always abusive.

## RECOMMENDED READING

Mennonite Central Committee. "Crossing the Boundary: Professional Sexual Abuse." Packet of articles, available for \$5 from P.O. Box 500, Akron, Pennsylvania 17501-0500.

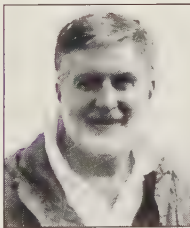
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# Psychosocial Factors in Vocational Choice

*Philip D. Cristantiello, Ph.D.*

**I**t is commonly assumed that people choosing clerical or religious vocations are moved by motives that are inherently spiritual and altruistic. Vocation directors, formation personnel, and diocesan officials rely on existing assessment procedures and quality standards of admission in order to screen out individuals with inappropriate intentions. Nevertheless, rare but increasing instances of misconduct and the growing numbers of people in religious life who decide to leave rather than to persevere indicate that close scrutiny of motivation is warranted.

Apparent altruistic behaviors and well-articulated declarations of intent on the part of applicants do not suffice to quell concerns about the authenticity and integrity of motivation. Self-serving interests frequently masquerade as altruism, and an underdeveloped adult identity, when present, is an inadequate basis for making a permanent vocational choice. But it is difficult to raise questions about the subject of motivation when the need for more vocations is clearly evident—especially for those of us who are mindful of Mark Twain's classic admonition, at the beginning of *Huckleberry Finn*, that motive seekers are liable to be prosecuted.

## **CHARACTER OF VOCATIONAL CHOICE**

This article considers various psychosocial factors that sometimes influence a decision to apply for

admission to programs of formation. While it implicitly raises concern about the suitability of certain vocational attractions, there is no intent to minimize or deny the authentic natural and supernatural character of a clerical or religious calling. The position taken in this brief paper is that vocational choice is multifaceted, changeable, and maturing. At any given chronological period, an individual's state of motivational awareness can be sure or uncertain, and the level of insight into its true character may be but a glimpse or a comprehensive penetration. The objective of this article is to advance the elucidation of factors that in some instances underlie decisions to apply for admission.

Counseling experience with persons both prior and subsequent to ordination points to the importance of addressing the character of vocational choice. Recent publications (*Program of Priestly Formation*, 1993, articles 513 and 519, and *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, article 50) voice a similar concern. They suggest that a person's level of insight regarding interpersonal relations and his or her level of psychosexual development are important criteria in considering admission to candidacy. Formation personnel are asked to take particular care to help seminarians know and appreciate the true nature of their acceptance of celibacy.

Programs of formation act wisely in addressing celibacy in a number of ways (e.g., through courses



and conferences). This article not only underscores the importance of such efforts but also seeks to augment them by heightening awareness of the various psychosocial factors that might lead someone to apply for admission to a program of formation.

While some of the factors outlined in the following sections existed in the past, their number may be increasing, along with a rising negative influence on perseverance.

## ASSESSING A CALL

Determining the validity of an individual's call to a celibate vocation is a complex undertaking. There are natural and supernatural aspects, interior and exterior signs, and none are neatly demarcated or subject to precise measurement.

Helping applicants and candidates sort out their motives and readiness to accept the charism of celibacy is essential prior to admission, and afterward as well. Doubt and confusion about aims, whether shown subtly or expressed forthrightly, are known to arise at various stages of formation and ministry. Consequently, periodic opportunities should be provided wherein the issue of suitability can be reviewed with a spiritual director and a counseling psychologist.

Despite articulate testimonies presented at the admissions phase, not all applicants have a sure sense of their suitability and readiness for a clerical or religious vocation. Embarking on a vocation remains a major life undertaking, making it prudent and allowable to take care in making a decision. Nor does every applicant have a confident feeling for what it is to be a man or a woman, as well as a comfortable, unambiguous sense of sexual identification. No applicant need feel guilty or ashamed if this be his or her case. But it is necessary that such issues be explored, clarified, and resolved before commitment is made.

If a seemingly inappropriate attraction is identified, an assessment of its influence should be undertaken. One will want to consider the extent to which it obscures, dominates, or undercuts the calling. Is the draw so compelling or driving as to raise doubts about the applicant's freedom? Does it arise from some abnormal psychological peculiarity or from nontraditional cultural mores? If the attraction is a result of immaturity, is it capable of being transformed to a higher level of maturity? If it poses some threat to the authentic character of the calling, can one realistically expect that it can be checked or restrained over a long period of commitment? These are some of the questions that admissions and formation personnel should attempt to answer.

The next section includes a list of "nonspiritual at-

tractions" that have been found to influence decisions to choose a clerical or religious vocation. The list is not exhaustive. It developed out of clinical experience, not from a formal research study. The existence of one or more of the listed attractions does not necessarily negate the presence of a true vocation. Such attractions, however, impinge on the quality of commitment, its continuity, and the individual's emotional and spiritual integrity. They pose relevant considerations for the admission process, spiritual direction, psychological assessment, and counseling.

The list is presented primarily for professional reflection by admissions and formation personnel. It carries no intent to impugn or to impute wickedness to any candidate. It is likely that each of us lives with artful dodges that we don't quite understand. Even formal psychological assessment cannot identify motives with pinpoint accuracy. These truisms, however, needn't deter us from trying to further Thomas à Kempis's insight that a humble knowledge of oneself is a road to God.

## PSYCHOSOCIAL FACTORS

The term *nonspiritual attraction* is used here to denote a factor that exists on a natural level and has the power to draw a person (consciously or not) to vocation. It implies the existence of an applicant's personal susceptibility, predisposition, or natural inclination to the influence(s) of what attracts. The attraction, which may or may not be fully recognized by the applicant, may also be either known to or hidden from outside observers. Nonspiritual attractions color an applicant's call when:

1. Admission to the formation environment is used as a means of reinforcing a sense of selectiveness, uniqueness, superiority, and privilege (e.g., a "call from God," virginity designated as a higher state of life than marriage, the utilization of distinctive dress and garments, access to authoritative power through rites and rituals).
2. The vocation is viewed as a socially sanctioned means of removing oneself from the societal demands of relating to the opposite sex. In short, the individual seeks a legitimate excuse to avoid performing the standard male or female gender role.
3. The applicant is drawn to immersion in a sexually homogeneous population because of his or her preference for "safe," same-sex affiliations.
4. The person seeks to have basic living needs met, with security, outside of the competitive work environment, or wishes to avoid societal pressures to achieve upward mobility and attain material wealth.

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**Despite articulate testimonies presented at the admissions phase, not all applicants have a sure sense of their suitability and readiness for a clerical or religious vocation**

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5. Despite articulate testimonies presented at the admissions phase, not all applicants have a sure sense of their suitability and readiness for a clerical or religious vocation. Escape is sought from the conflicting ideologies and varied social mores that pressure and discomfort people in a secular, pluralistic society.
6. The applicant seeks the comfort of an atypical psychosexual environment in which demands to work out intimate interpersonal relationships appear to be low.

7. The person seeks to relate to a large, preselected, somewhat docile and obedient audience that he or she believes will demonstrate dependency, offer esteem, and diminish concerns he or she might have about personal rejection if otherwise situated in society.
8. A sanctioned outlet is sought for inordinate personal absorption with morality and judgment.
9. Personally ambiguous perceptions of, and behaviors related to, sexual identity, sexual expression, affection, love, and dependence are clarified by institutional structure and direction, thereby relieving the individual of the confusion and anxiety associated with personal decision making.
10. Association with a powerful and influential institution not only conveys status about being "right" and in control but also compensates for a perceived personal inadequacy.

Any use of this list in its present form for direct questioning of, or reading by, applicants or candidates requires prudence. Although the list does touch on intriguing motivational possibilities, it does not translate automatically into an interview tool or self-questionnaire. Persons wishing to adapt this material for such purposes are asked to contact the author.



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# The Gift of Confrontation

*Richard Hart, O.F.M.Cap., M.A.*

**O**ften we find ourselves in a position of needing to confront someone yet feeling powerless to do so. Even the word *confront* sounds ominous and fearful. I prefer to think *care-front* rather than *con-front*, with the idea that one takes the role of confronter out of true caring for the individual and a desire to support or encourage that person's growth. God is pictured in the scriptures as a caring God, a God of consolation, but also a disturbing God. When God asked Adam and Eve, "Where are you?" God asked a very important and caring question. It is the same question that God asks us: "Where are you in your relationship to me, to others, and to yourself?" When God asked Cain where Abel was, that was a caring question. God asks us also whether we value others enough to be concerned about them.

The prophets showed this care for God's people. Isaiah said, "Fear not, I am with you; be not dismayed; I am your God, I will strengthen you, and help you, and uphold you with my right hand of justice" (41:10). He could also speak of the Lord in this fashion: "His lips are filled with fury, his tongue is like a consuming fire" (30:27). Jeremiah could say of God, "With age-old love I have loved you; so I have kept my mercy toward you" (31:3). But he also said, "Cursed is the man who trusts in human be-

ings, who seeks strength in flesh, whose heart turns away from the Lord" (17:5). Ezekiel expressed God's care as follows: "I shall look for the lost one, bring back the stray, bandage the wounded and make the weak strong. I shall watch over the fat and healthy. I shall be a true shepherd to them" (34:16-18). He also hears God say to the enemies of God's favored people: "I mean to hand you over to bloodshed and bloodshed will pursue you, I swear it. . . . I am going to reduce you to desolation, forever your towns will remain uninhabited, and so you will learn that I am Yahweh" (35:6-9). The words of these and other prophets show that God is not only a consoling God but also at times a disturbing God.

But all the prophets pale into insignificance with the coming of Jesus. John the Baptist announced his coming and was not afraid to confront by stating, "Reform your lives! The reign of God is at hand." And when he saw the Pharisees and Sadducees, he said, "You brood of vipers! Who told you to flee from the wrath to come? Give some evidence that you mean to reform" (Matt. 3:2, 7-8). He also confronted Herod, who had married Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip—and suffered the consequences of being beheaded (Mark 6:17-18, 22-28).

## JESUS' APPROACH INSTRUCTIVE

No one confronted, however, the way Jesus did. He was not only willing to console people by his many miracles of mercy; he was also willing to upset their comfort zones. Jesus also lashed out at the Scribes and Pharisees, calling them "hypocrites": "Let them go their way; they are blind leaders of the blind. If one blind man leads another, both will end in a pit" (Matt. 15:7,14). He also called them "frauds": "You travel over sea and land to make a single convert, but once he is converted, you make a devil of him twice as wicked as yourselves" (Matt. 23:15).

Jesus' message was not all sweetness, but he challenged us: "If your brother should commit some wrong against you, go and point out his fault, but keep it between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. If he does not listen, summon another, so that every case may stand on the word of two or three witnesses. If he ignores them, refer it to the church. If he ignores even the church, then treat him as you would a Gentile or a tax collector" (Matt. 18:15–17). Now, we can argue whether Jesus said this or not—especially the section concerning the church and how we are to treat individuals. But we can't argue against the need to go to someone who has wronged us rather than writing a letter or note. In some situations the only approach might be the latter, but too many letters and notes have been misunderstood or misinterpreted. Face-to-face encounters can often settle what the written word cannot. But how many of us are willing to risk confrontation? We prefer the easier way.

If a personal encounter fails, then we should seek the advice of a wise person to help us. There is strength in numbers. The book of Deuteronomy states that "one witness alone shall not take the stand against a man in regard to any crime or any offense of which he may be guilty; a judicial fact shall be established only on the testimony of two or three witnesses" (19:15).

If this approach fails, according to Matthew's gospel, we should take the matter to the fellowship of Christians, so that the situation may be judged in a spirit of love and prayer. Should all this not produce any results, then we might regard the stubborn person as no better than "a Gentile or a tax collector"—although even they can be forgiven, as was obvious from the lives of Zacchaeus and Matthew. So we don't ever abandon someone as hopeless; we continue to love the individual because, as Saint Paul tells us, "Love never fails" (I Cor. 13:8).

When Jesus taught his apostles that he was going to suffer deeply, be rejected, be put to death, and rise

three days later, Peter took him aside and began to re-monstrate with him. Jesus confronted Peter with the words, "Get out of my sight, you satan! You are not judging by God's standards but by man's" (Mark 8:33).

One day Philip said to Jesus: "Show us the Father, and that will be enough for us."

"Philip," Jesus replied, "after I have been with you all this time, you still do not know me?" (John 14:8–9). Jesus was probably hurt by Philip's statement, and he confronted Philip to let him know what effect it had on him. Jesus shows us the importance of when to speak. As the Book of Ecclesiastes states, there is "a time to be silent, and a time to speak" (3:7).

## PURPOSE OF CONFRONTATION

The purpose of confrontation is not always to change the behavior of another person. Rather, it is to create an environment in which it becomes possible for a person to change his or her behavior. It presents the person being confronted with an opportunity for self-examination. A powerful example of this is found in the second book of Samuel, in which Nathan confronts David. David, who is in love with Bathsheba, finds out she is married to Uriah. David has had sexual relations with her, and she has told him that she is with child. David sends Uriah to the front lines, and Uriah is killed. Then Nathan is sent by God to David to confront him. He creates the climate for change by telling David a story of a rich man and a poor man. The rich man had huge herds and flocks, and the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb. One day the rich man entertained a man, but instead of killing one of his own sheep, he killed the poor man's only lamb. David, upset by the story, says to Nathan, "As the Lord lives, the man who has done this merits death!"

Nathan replies to David, "You are the man!" (2 Sam. 12:5, 7). As a result of this encounter, David reflects on what he has done and repents. In this context, we should read Psalm 51, which graphically depicts his repentance.

Jesus was a master at creating the climate for someone to change. He spots Zacchaeus, the tax collector, in a sycamore tree and tells him that he wants to be a guest at his home that day. The multitude witnesses this and murmurs, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." But the climate Jesus has created through his role in this encounter enables Zacchaeus to say, "I give half my belongings to the poor. If I have defrauded anyone in the least, I pay him back four-fold."

Jesus responds, "Today salvation has come to this house. . . . For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:2–10).



Another purpose of confrontation is to offer the maximum amount of information with the minimum of threat and stress. The opposite usually happens. Jesus said to the Samaritan woman: “Go, call your husband, and then come back here.”

“I have no husband,” replied the woman.

“You are right in saying you have no husband!” Jesus exclaimed. “The fact is, you have had five, and the man you are living with now is not your husband. What you say is true” (John 4:16–18). The way Jesus handled her helped her to influence other Samaritans from that town to believe in him.

When confronting a person or group, we have to make sure we are not trying to punish. It is easy to get even, to exact revenge or to dominate a person or group through confrontation. Too often, we use confrontation to relieve our frustration or anxiety—to tell people off. This approach only increases conflict and stress rather than diminishing or lessening them. We should always be more interested in promoting people’s growth or creating a climate that helps them change. Jesus did not lash out at the men who brought an adulteress to him. He calmly said to them, “Let the man among you who has no sin be the first to cast a stone at her” (John 8:7)—and they started to walk away, realizing their own sinfulness. Jesus then gave the woman some sound advice: “You may go. But from now on, avoid this sin” (John 8:11).

## FORMS OF CONFRONTATION

Conflict is often dealt with indirectly rather than directly. If someone really bothers us, we take a cold shower, go swimming, scrub the floor, or watch television instead of confronting that person. Watching television—especially violent shows—can be a way to vent some of our feelings. Watching football games or wrestling matches can sometimes be a way to deal with frustrations or hidden anger. I once saw someone who disagreed with a call an umpire made during a football game go up to the television set with his fist upraised and cry, “That’s wrong!”

We can also use verbal abuse—in the form of cynicism, sarcasm, ridicule, or caustic, critical remarks—to deal with a person or a group. People working for the church are often faced with the prospect of growing in their faith or becoming cynical. Phil Donahue is a good example of someone who lost his faith while working for the church and has become very cynical. He maintains that people go one of two ways: “Either they stay in there swinging despite the knowledge of their powerlessness, or they go the way of yoga, guitar lessons, astrology, psychiatry or plain unglamorous, uncamouflaged dropping out.”

One of the better ways to counteract someone else’s cynicism is to have the courage to say something uplifting rather than let the conversation deteriorate. Saint Paul encourages us: “Never let evil talk pass your lips; say only the good things others need to hear, things that will really help them” (Eph. 4:29).

Sarcasm can be devastating; in getting a point across, usually in a humorous way, it can injure someone’s reputation or make a person feel very uneasy. Some people aren’t even aware of how sarcastic they are. When confronted about our sarcasm, some of us deny it or insist that we intended no harm. How many of us are willing, or have the courage, to leave when sarcastic remarks are made or to show some kind of disapproval?

Many snide remarks are made about others or particular situations. Snipers take their pot shots at others but make sure others can’t return the volley. Some are Mack trucks who roll over us and hope that will do the job. Exploders really should wear a sign: DANGER, HIGH VOLTAGE. The clammers won’t speak at all or, if they do speak, say only “nope” or “yep.” These and other indirect ways of handling a situation do not work. What we do not talk out, we will act out. But so often we feel powerless in talking out something that is bothering us.

If we read only the first five chapters of the Acts of the Apostles, we get the impression that everything was running smoothly in the early church. But we have to read on. In chapter six we learn that the widows who spoke Greek complained because they were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. They had to speak out and be heard. In chapter fifteen we read that Barnabas wanted to take Mark along on a trip. Paul objected because Mark had deserted them at Pamphylia. The disagreement became so acute that Paul and Barnabas went their separate ways.

Paul often had to confront the early church. He told the church in Corinth: “What I now have to say is not said in praise, because your meetings are not profitable but harmful. First of all, I hear that when you gather for a meeting there are divisions among you, and I am inclined to believe it” (I Cor. 11:17–18). Paul knew what to expect at times: “I fear that when I come I may not find you to my liking, nor may you find me to yours. I may find discord, jealousy, outburst of anger, slander and gossip, self-importance, disorder” (2 Cor. 12:20).

## RESISTING CONFRONTATION

When confronted, we often find escapes or make excuses. Some ward off confrontation by defending

themselves: "I have always been this way." "Sorry, this is the way I am." "This is how I was in the beginning, am now, and ever shall be." Probably the best answer is, "Then nature has done badly." Some of us respond by attacking the confronter, saying, "You do the same thing." That often leaves us in a powerless position. Sometimes we procrastinate, hoping that maybe the person will change and we won't have to confront. We keep on tolerating the behavior or the situation, which usually becomes much worse. Perhaps we would like someone else to confront the individual, especially someone in authority, like a local leader or boss.

The problem often boils down to how one deals with difficult people—especially those who will not let you get close to them or allow you to say much to them. To put it another way, How do you embrace a porcupine?

### MANNER OF CONFRONTATION

If confronting means that we are interested in another's growth, we need to pray over the matter before engaging in this delicate act of communication. We have to make sure we don't put ourselves in an "I win, you lose" situation. If we are honest with ourselves, we know how biased we can become toward someone else. In confrontation, we have to tell the person about our biases, which is not easy. It can be very challenging to speak to the person as an equal, not as someone inferior to you. It is clear from the gospels that when Jesus spoke to others, he demonstrated a radical mutuality. He did not consider himself better than others, even though he was sinless.

We have to be careful when confronting that we are not acting out of revenge, punishment, or domination, or trying to shame the person. It is so easy to fall into this trap. Even though Jesus called the Scribes and Pharisees hypocrites, he did not lash out at them in a spirit of revenge or punishment. It is easy to shame someone, especially before others. This can be most humiliating and often accomplishes little (if any) good. More harm has probably been done to people through shaming than through any other means of confrontation.

When I was a young seminarian, my pastor and I drove to Huntington, Indiana, from Wisconsin. He asked me to drive part of the way. At the time I was still learning how to drive. I passed a car, and he asked me, "Do you mind if I make a suggestion?"

I responded, "No, go ahead."

He instructed me: "When you pass a car, you have to make sure you have really passed the car before pulling back into the lane." I never forgot that, especially the manner in which he addressed me. He

didn't say, "You dumb klutz, don't you know what you just did?"

It is also easy to blame a person, which only evokes a lot of resistance and resentment. Experts point out that blame is powerless to effect any true change and growth. Adam blamed Eve, and Eve blamed the serpent. Bob Hoffman has written a book entitled *No One Is to Blame*. He maintains that "everyone is guilty and no one is to blame. Until the adult intellect learns that the real source of its problems is the negative emotional child, it is powerless to change."

In confronting someone, we need to focus on his or her behavior and avoid attacking the person or what might motivate him or her to act in a certain way. Jesus pointed out the behavior of the Scribes and Pharisees: "Their words are bold but their deeds are few. They bind up heavy loads, hard to carry, to lay on other men's shoulders, while they themselves will not lift a finger to budge them. All their works are performed to be seen. They widen their phylacteries and wear huge tassels. They are fond of places of honor at banquets and the front seats in the synagogues" (Matt. 23:4-7).

When confronting someone, we need to be careful to state what is fact and what is feeling. Too many feelings can be expressed in a condemning or judgmental way. Perhaps you have asked someone for information and received only a grunt, groan, or silence in reply. A constructive response might be, "Please tell me what that grunt/grunt/silence means."

It is also important to deal with one problem at a time, not a whole litany of grievances. In confrontation, many of us tend to unload on the person or to recall things that happened many years ago. Often the person is unable to recall these incidents or is too emotional during the encounter to accept more than one problem. When we complain about something—for example, a room left dirty—we have to make sure that our complaint is really about the problem stated, not about a deeper problem, such as an inability to relate to the person.

We should allow the confronted person or group to give us some feedback, in order to make sure we are understood. Too often, we can express our point of view and then ask, in a domineering way, "Are there any questions?" But we may receive no answer, because the confronted person or group does not feel free to give us feedback.

It is important to confront immediately and not to wait or procrastinate. Procrastination has often been characterized as the devil's chloroform. The devil really isn't concerned about how much we do, as long as we don't do it today. Not confronting immediately only makes it a tough job later. We have to join the TNT Club: Today, Not Tomorrow. Recently, I



was told by a friend that I should have pointed out immediately a behavior that upset me rather than waiting a few days. The suggestion was indeed appropriate and will be remembered.

Not everyone is capable of confronting others in a helpful way. Brother Juniper, who was known as the Little Clown of God, helped keep Saint Francis of Assisi from becoming too serious. Because he was so guileless, Juniper was able to correct his brothers without any of them taking offense. No wonder Saint Francis wished that he had a forest of Junipers.

## BENEFITS OF CONFRONTATION

The benefits of confrontation cannot be overemphasized. One is the ability to ease the tension and conflict that often arise between individuals or within groups. Often, tension and conflict continue to grow, and matters get worse or deteriorate. The early church recognized this and would often take the time to deal with tension and conflict concerning such matters as the circumcision of Gentiles. Paul encouraged the Ephesians to “profess the truth in love and grow to the full maturity of Christ the head” (4:15).

Confrontation is a powerful way to build healthy relationships, which are so necessary for growth. It is a way to help us out of mediocrity and prod us to achieve more growth. We need to make others feel important, as Jesus did, and to take them where they are, not where we want them to be.

Solomon, when asked what he wanted from God, asked not for wisdom but for an understanding heart. That is indeed a precious gift, and one we need in confronting others. Words may fail us at times, but love will bridge whatever gap is there.

In his book *Paschal Journey: Reflections on Psycho-Spiritual Growth*, Patrick Brennan writes, “I think that there might be more enduring relationships,

healthier people, less compulsive self-destructive behavior if more of us learned to gently confront, challenge, intervene, rather than ignoring dysfunctional behavior; engaging in avoidance behaviors, or sweeping obvious problems under the rug.”

Confrontation is an important facet of communication. It can bring us closer to others, and interpersonal closeness helps us grow as persons. We are most a person when we communicate effectively. Our growth is dependent on our contact with others; the deeper the contact, the greater the growth that will result.

Confrontation is an encounter that demands risk and pain. But the results can be most gratifying, especially to help clear the air and to express our feelings, which can improve and deepen our relationships with others—the ultimate goal of confrontation. Confrontation can help us know ourselves and others better and enable us to value more the gift of friendship.

## RECOMMENDED READING

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# The Narcissistic Minister

*Len Sperry, M.D., Ph.D.*

**T**rouble had been brewing for some time at All Saints Church, and it recently erupted in this otherwise quiet suburban parish. Composed of a majority of retirees and families headed by young professionals, as well as a sizable group of undergraduate and graduate students from a nearby private university, this large parish had been relatively trouble-free since it was established. But a civil suit brought against the parish and the diocese by disgruntled parishioners unleashed a torrent of sentiment within the parish to replace the liturgy director, the parish council, and the pastor. The suit alleged that the liturgy director had engaged in sexual impropriety with young women in the parish, and that although the pastor and parish council had been apprised of the matter, they had failed to respond appropriately and in a timely fashion.

The liturgy director, married, childless, and in his late forties, had been employed by the parish for four years. He had been hired after an exhaustive search to find someone with his credentials: a graduate degree in liturgy and successful experience with a large, diverse parish. During his first few months at All Saints, his charm and wit had won over many skeptics—particularly among the older parishioners, who were not eager to replace traditional liturgies and devotions with new ones. In a short time, he succeeded in commanding a sizable, loyal following.

Nevertheless, his flamboyant manner led some to complain to the diocese and others to leave for a more compatible parish community. A subsequent diocesan report concluded that while the parish's liturgical and paraliturgical services were within liturgical guidelines, the services were more like performances than occasions of worship.

The pastor supported the liturgy director through those difficult early times. On the surface, matters seemed to have settled down in the liturgy director's second and third years in the job. In his third year of service, however, although he had always dressed impeccably, he became even more noticeably preoccupied with his appearance and signs of aging. He returned from an extended vacation with a new look—acquired by means of a facelift and hair transplant.

Before the liturgy director had arrived at All Saints, the liturgy committee had consisted of a number of mature men and women appointed by the previous pastor. Shortly thereafter, the committee composition changed dramatically to include young, attractive professional women who became extremely loyal to the new director. When rumors surfaced that the new pastor had placed some limitations on the director because of complaints of impropriety and scandal, the liturgy committee members rose to the director's defense and turned on the pastor and parish council.



The liturgy director in question is a minister who clearly meets the diagnostic criteria for narcissistic personality disorder. (I briefly profiled this personality as one of the six most common “Neurotic Personalities in Religious Settings” in *HUMAN DEVELOPMENT*, Fall 1991). The reality is that narcissistic individuals are attracted to ministries—particularly those involving high visibility and/or leadership responsibilities. Furthermore, narcissistic ministers are becoming increasingly common in religious organizations, including parishes, religious communities of men and women, and diocesan and other ecclesial offices. Unfortunately, narcissistic ministers can wreak an incredible amount of havoc.

Not all narcissistic ministers are the same, just as not all narcissistic politicians or executives are the same. Although much has been published about narcissistic psychopathology, relatively little of the literature has differentiated its variants or types, and none has described these types in religious settings. Accordingly, this article delineates three variants of this personality pattern, ranging from clearly pathological to relatively healthy, among ministry personnel. Before focusing on these variants, however, I will briefly describe the basic narcissistic pattern common to all three.

## BASIC NARCISSISTIC PATTERN

Narcissistic ministers are typically heralded as individuals possessing great potential. Consequently, great things are expected of them, yet seldom is their full potential realized. Eventually, although some of these individuals can be extremely effective ministers, problems inevitably arise. For one, their unceasing need for admiration and the exploitative nature of their relationships become irritating. Also, as time goes by, their ministerial presence seems less than genuine. In striving for success, they easily and readily manipulate others. Typically, significant stressors—for example, the onset of physical aging, career setbacks, and the increasing experience of emptiness in their relationships—precipitate crises in their lives and trouble in their ministries.

Narcissists believe they must rely on themselves rather than on others for the gratification of their needs. They live with the conviction that it is unsafe to depend on anyone’s love or loyalty. They pretend to be self-sufficient, but in the depths of their being, they experience a sense of deprivation and emptiness. To cope with these feelings and to assuage their insecurity, narcissists become preoccupied with establishing their power, appearance, status, prestige, and superiority. At the same time, they expect others to recognize their entitlement and specialness and to

meet their needs. What is particularly striking is their interpersonal exploitativeness. Narcissistic individuals live under the illusion that they are entitled to be served, that their own desires take precedence over those of others, and that they deserve special consideration in life.

It must be emphasized, however, that these characteristics can occur with different degrees of intensity. A certain dose of narcissism is necessary to function effectively, and everyone exhibits some narcissistic behavior. Many individuals who possess only modest narcissistic tendencies are very talented and capable of making great contributions to society. However, those who gravitate toward the pathological extreme give narcissism its pejorative reputation.

## VARIANTS OF NARCISSISM

Narcissistic ministers occupy different positions on a spectrum ranging from healthy narcissism to pathology. Three basic variants of narcissism in ministers will be described here. These descriptions have been adapted from the types of narcissism found among executives and leaders, as developed by Manfred Kets de Vries. For him, the factors that distinguish between health and dysfunction are intrapsychic and interpersonal dynamics.

The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, Fourth Edition (DSM-IV)* makes the distinction in behavioral terms, listing nine criteria: a grandiose sense of self-importance or uniqueness; a preoccupation with fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance, beauty, or ideal love; a sense of specialness; a need for excessive admiration from others; interpersonal exploitativeness; entitlement; arrogance and haughtiness; being envious of others; and a lack of empathy. A diagnosis of narcissistic personality disorder is suggested when five or more of these criteria are met; fewer than five suggests the presence of narcissistic traits.

The enneagram provides another means of characterizing the narcissistic personality. The “three” individual, striving for success and achievement, best reflects this behavioral pattern. In enneagram parlance, an “unredeemed” three would probably correlate with the first and second variants of narcissism described here—reactive narcissism and self-deceptive narcissism—whereas a “redeemed” three would probably correlate with the third variant, constructive narcissism.

## REACTIVE NARCISSISM

Some ministers exhibiting reactive narcissism clearly meet the diagnostic criteria for narcissistic personality disorder but also exhibit features of the

sadistic, paranoid, and antisocial or sociopathic personalities. M. Scott Peck calls these individuals "people of the lie"; Otto Kernberg would diagnose them as "malignant narcissists." Although they appear to be charming and engaging, these individuals can easily be cold, calculating, and ruthless. According to Kets de Vries, they suffer from severe developmental deficits. Normal development entails processes involving two important spheres of the self that are poorly integrated in the reactive narcissist. The first is the tendency to obtain reassurance through recognition, praise, and admiration, which is called "mirroring," or nurturing what is referred to as the "grandiose self." The second is the tendency to feel powerful through identification with and idealization of another, who serves as an idealized parental image. Reactive narcissists have usually experienced harsh, sometimes brutal parenting. Typically, the mother was critical and demanding, whereas the father was passive or absent. Often, the mother expected her son to become a priest. Subsequently, phase-appropriate development in the early years did not occur. Frustrating experiences were poorly handled. As children, reactive narcissists acquired a defective, poorly integrated sense of identity and subsequently were unable to maintain a stable sense of self-esteem and a cohesive sense of self. To cope with these problems, they created a self-view of specialness in compensation for a constant feeling of never having been loved by their parents. Their early traumatic experiences continue to haunt them, lurking in their dreams and reveries. Unable to suppress or master them, the narcissist continues to react to them in predictable ways.

Creating the illusion of uniqueness is one method of coping or mastery, but a brittle one. The reactive narcissist's inner fragility affects all his or her dealings with the external environment. Any discrepancies between capacities and wants are likely to accentuate anxiety and impair reality testing. As a result, individuals with this disorder tend to distort outside events to manage anxiety and to prevent a sense of loss and disappointment. Some even cultivate a cultlike following. For example, a priest or minister who is a reactive narcissist will attract a small band of devoted, loyal followers who in time will voluntarily donate immense amounts of time and money to serving that individual. Although the followers may be successful professionals, they are attracted to that minister because he or she recognizes and responds to their unmet needs. They may have experienced a sense of personal inadequacy, loneliness, or disappointment to which others in the parish or religious community have not sufficiently responded. Because such followers often have strong

dependency needs, they are willing to submit to the charismatic authority of the minister in exchange for the sense of security and belonging that affiliation with that minister promises. They also bask in the halo of the minister's power and specialness. Reactive narcissistic ministers are typically granted special sexual access to their followers, in addition to numerous material benefits.

Predictably, when such ministers are under investigation by a parish, order, or diocese, their followers come to their defense, denouncing the charges and those making them. They hail the minister as a caring, concerned, even saintlike individual who is the victim of a conspiracy. If the minister is fired or transferred, the followers will move with him or her. The tragedies at Jonestown in Guyana and at Waco, Texas, involving the religious cult leaders Jim Jones and David Koresh, suggest the degree of mind control such individuals can have over their followers.

Reactive narcissists who are in major positions of religious leadership can cause considerable trouble. They tend to surround themselves with a coterie of sycophantic followers. They exhibit little or no concern about hurting others in pursuit of their own interests and readily devalue others to underscore their own superiority. Because of a significant empathic deficit in their personality structure, they have little awareness or appreciation of others' needs and feelings. They tend to undertake projects on a grand scale but are often doomed to failure because of lack of judgment and an absence of reality testing. And predictably, when things go wrong, they blame others.

## **SELF-DECEPTIVE NARCISSISM**

The second type of narcissistic minister also meets the criteria for narcissistic personality disorder but does not exhibit the extremes of cruelty and paranoia displayed by the reactive narcissist. The self-deceptive narcissist experiences a rather different pattern of early childhood development. During early development, ministers with this disorder were probably overstimulated or overburdened. One or both parents led them to believe that they were completely lovable and perfect, regardless of their actions and in spite of reality. As children, these individuals became the proxies of their parents, entrusted with a mission to fulfill many unrealized parental hopes. Needless to say, they became profoundly anxious because of the ideals of perfection given them by their parents, and uncertain that they could achieve those ideals. What may have appeared as indulgence on the part of the parents was actually the opposite: the parents used these children to meet their own needs. The imposi-



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## By requiring celibacy, church authorities may unwittingly be sanctioning the narcissistic minister's autoerotic preference

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tion of exaggerated parental expectations greatly confused these individuals about their actual abilities, which led to the creation of delusory beliefs about themselves. Such unrealistic beliefs may provide the original impetus that differentiates the self-deceptive narcissist from others.

In some instances, unusually talented and motivated children are able to achieve a level of success consistent with the parent's exaggerated expectations. In other cases, children with less talent or opportunities may utilize exaggerated parental expectations as the basis for excelling in some endeavor. In general, however, the self-delusory quality of the unrealistic beliefs created by the parents leads to problems. An exalted self-image is usually difficult to sustain in the light of external circumstances such as disappointment and failure. An overvalued image of the self, internalized from an idealizing parent, can become more realistic after interactions with more honest and critical peers—but the vestiges of traumatic early disappointments tend to be indelibly etched on the fragile and distorted concept of self. Accordingly, self-deceiving narcissists are likely to suffer from interpersonal difficulties stemming from their desire to live up to internalized parental illusions of their self-worth. Thus, their emotions are superficial and their behavior has an ideal-hungry quality. In short, they find intimacy difficult and look for others to provide structure to their lives.

For self-deceiving narcissists, ministry provides a ready-made forum to reinforce and reconfirm the grandiose self. The theological formulation of vocation as a call from God, a sign of being set apart, serves as further reinforcement and confirmation of their belief in their inherent specialness and superi-

ority over others. For those in public ministries (e.g., liturgical presiders, homilists, lectors, choir directors), the religious service is viewed as a forum for exhibiting that special call. The religious service is first and foremost a performance in which the worshiping congregation mirrors (i.e., admires and praises) the minister. Thus, essentially, the narcissist believes that the real purpose of the religious service is worship of the minister.

Because of their self-absorption, self-deceiving narcissistic ministers must creatively distort the precept to love God and neighbor to fit their pathological perspective. For them, God—like everyone else—exists for one purpose: to love and take care of them. Their basic spiritual deficit is a lack of awareness of grace and an incapacity for gratitude. Not surprisingly, they imagine God as an all-giving father, and they perceive faith as magical entreaty. Consequently, they believe that God will do exactly as they ask in their prayers, with no regard to the kind of claim God has on them. For them, there is only one kind of prayer: the prayer of petition or demand. Prayer as praise, self-examination, forgiveness, or thanksgiving has little meaning for them. Some narcissistic ministers may have intense mystical leanings that pull them in the direction of mystical experience, including the occult. This is understandable in light of their sense of specialness and grandiosity. However, they are more likely to experience a hypomanic state of self-exaltation than a true mystical state. When prayers are not answered as they expect, they become narcissistically wounded and feel deeply rejected. As a result, they may reject God, becoming atheists for an instant or forever, because God has let them down.

They are also likely to be insensitive to the suffering and needs of others. Although they may help others in need and engage in acts of charity, they do so only if they know their charitable deeds will be noticed by others. If their efforts do not bring attention to them, they won't make a donation, extend a helping hand, lend a listening ear, or continue any such aid when the attention and praise of others stops.

In an article entitled "Narcissistic Psychopathology and the Clergy," J. Reid Meloy notes that sexuality for the narcissistic minister—whether celibate or married—is basically autoerotic. This autoerotic preference is usually consciously denied but will be seen in a pattern of transient and multiple sex partners. Paradoxically, the narcissist's search for the perfect body to mirror his or her sexual desire, as well as the desire to be young and attractive forever, may be accompanied by impotence. Without a physiological cause, the inability to achieve an erection may result from the narcissist's fear of dependency. Meloy

points out that celibacy may support the narcissist's autoerotic preference because it allows the freedom of sexual fantasy, which is not limited by the imperfections, awkwardness, messiness, or inconvenience of actual contact with another person and can be perfectly gratifying. Furthermore, Meloy contends that by requiring celibacy, church authorities may unwittingly be sanctioning the narcissistic minister's preference for fantasy and masturbation.

It is important to underscore that self-deceptive narcissistic ministers are much more approachable than their reactive counterparts. They are not nearly as exploitative and are more tolerant of dissenting opinions. They also appear to be more insecure. They are wary of threats in the environment and attempt to avoid making mistakes. They are not as quick to devalue others, are more eager to please, and are willing to engage in deals and exchanges with their followers. Their style of relating can have a more collegial quality as compared with that of reactive narcissists, who are more concerned with how to transform those around them. Although there are clear differences in the origins and relational behaviors of self-deceiving and reactive narcissists, both are preoccupied with and dominated by their grandiosity.

In theory, it is easy to distinguish between reactive and self-deceptive narcissism, but in practice, the distinction is more difficult to make. This is mostly due to differences in parental responses toward the developing child. One parent might have taken a cold, hostile, rejecting attitude, whereas the other might have been supportive, thus resulting in different gradations or mixtures of narcissistic styles. In addition, instead of being frustrated when ambitious parental expectations were incongruent with external reality, the child may have strived successfully to bring his or her abilities up to their perceived capacity. Furthermore, learning experiences later in life may have had buffering or mitigating effects.

## **CONSTRUCTIVE NARCISSISM**

Constructive narcissists do not behave in a reactive or self-deceptive manner. Because they meet less than five of the nine criteria for narcissistic personality disorder, they do not qualify for that diagnosis. They seldom distort reality or use primitive defenses such as splitting, projection, or idealization, and they are less anxious and estranged from their thoughts and feelings than the other two types of narcissists described. Instead, they are willing to express their needs and take responsibility for their actions. They tend to be confident and independent thinkers, largely because of parental encouragement. Furthermore, they were helped by their parents to see things

in perspective and to avoid scapegoating and other destructive ploys. But most important, their parents' expectations of them were realistic and balanced, which promoted accurate reality testing. When disappointed, constructive narcissistic ministers seldom act spitefully, and they are capable of encouraging others and engaging in reparative action.

Nevertheless, these ministers have learned the art of manipulation and occasionally act opportunistically. Still, they have the capacity to relate collegially with peers and those to whom they minister. They possess a high degree of confidence in their abilities and are highly goal-oriented. They will take the ultimate responsibility for their decisions without blaming others when things go wrong. Although they sometimes come across as lacking in warmth and consideration, their sense of inner direction gives them the ability to inspire others and to create a common cause, transcending petty self-interests.

In summary, reactive narcissistic ministers tend to be ruthless, grandiose, and exhibitionistic. They seek to dominate and control and are extremely exploitative. Self-deceptive narcissistic ministers are less grandiose and exhibitionistic. They want to be liked and are much less tyrannical. Still, they lack empathy, are obsessed mainly with their own needs, and are given to being discreetly Machiavellian. Finally, constructive narcissistic ministers are also ambitious, manipulative, and hypersensitive to criticism. Yet they possess sufficient self-confidence, adaptability, and humor to be effective in a variety of ministerial situations and interpersonal challenges. Because constructive narcissistic ministers are not personality-disordered, they seldom create the havoc in their ministries that is the hallmark of the reactive and self-deceiving narcissists.

## **INTERVENTIONS WITH NARCISSISTIC MINISTERS**

For the most part, constructive narcissistic ministers engender little, if any, trouble in their ministries. But what can religious leaders and superiors do about the two more dysfunctional types of narcissistic ministers? In centralized religious organizations or communities in which a narcissistic minister is dominant, dismissal by a strong board (parish council, provincial council, or diocesan executive committee) on the grounds of poor performance may be the only possibility. This option may be of limited utility if the narcissistic minister has significant influence over members of such boards.

It is very difficult to modify the narcissistically disordered personality, especially in the case of the reactive narcissist. When the problems engendered by narcissistically disordered ministers become in-



surmountable, there may be no choice but to terminate or transfer them to reduce their influence or stem a crisis situation. Certain strategies and tactics may be effective in this regard. For example, with the troublesome reactive narcissistic minister, power and specific responsibilities can be distributed more broadly in the community or congregation to ensure that more members can be involved in strategic decisions. Task forces, parallel structures, and executive committees can provide forums in which other ministers can express their viewpoints; this permits narcissistic ministers to learn from others and enables others to mitigate such ministers' influence. Exclusivity, empire building, and unrealistic perspectives are discouraged. It is my experience that establishing boundaries and limits with either reactive or self-deceiving narcissists is difficult, and the religious leader or board may have to raise the prospect of termination, transfer, or legal action if change doesn't occur—and be fully prepared to take that action.

Furthermore, preventive maintenance should be a top priority. A strategic plan should be developed by all religious communities and organizations to modify recruitment, selection, and discernment procedures in order to screen out candidates with excessive narcissism. In business organizations, psychological assessment and psychologically focused interviewing are essential parts of the employee selection process, particularly in the hiring of middle- and upper-level managers. The typical manager may undergo a number of psychological assessments over the course of his or her career, usually when being considered for a promotion or job change. Management has found psychological data inestimably valuable in increasing the fit between employees and jobs, as well as in reducing losses and risk. Presumably, religious leaders would be equally concerned about the fit between individual ministers and particular ministries. Given that

the church has recently become quite sensitive to the matters of risk and financial loss, identifying excessive narcissism is not only prudent but also demonstrates care and concern for the community.

When such interventions fail and the narcissistic behavior of a minister becomes extreme, outside professional help is needed—if the individual is willing to consider that alternative. Referral for individual psychotherapy is one option; so is group therapy. Individual psychotherapy with the narcissistic minister is long-term, time-intensive, difficult, and costly. Interestingly, couples therapy has been shown to be the most efficient and cost-effective treatment for narcissists and may be the treatment of choice for married ministers.

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# Refounding a Dedicated Life

*Judith Ann Zielinski, O.S.F.*

**T**he foothills of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains rise about 7,000 feet above sea level and overlook a sinuous, rolling terrain of mesas, buttes, valleys, and canyons. In these foothills, which are home to artists, tourists, "New Agers," Native Americans, and coyotes, I spent a hundred days last spring on a midlife sabbatical, seeking not merely a renewal but a refoundation for my religious life.

What happened in the three-plus months I spent in that desert? An inner transformation, modest as well as monumental; a validation of religious vocation; and a graced embracing of the "mud and messiness" that constitute real life, relationships, and commitments. During the hundred days, I would feel struggle and surrender, ebb and flow, community and isolation, and an overwhelming remembering of God's graciousness. Most critically, I would come to recognize, name, and accept my own midlife "mud" as a gift, as the very path to grace. But none of that happened immediately.

The Sangre de Cristo Center, located about twelve miles north of Santa Fe, New Mexico, was established interprovincially in 1962 by the De La Salle Christian Brothers as a spiritual and professional renewal site for their own men. Gradually, the focus shifted exclusively to spirituality, with a structured sabbatical program offered first for male religious

and gradually expanded to include diocesan priests and, finally, women religious. Each hundred-day session (mine was the center's sixty-fourth), offered every spring and fall, hosts a group of approximately thirty-three participants from the United States and around the world, fairly evenly divided by gender.

After a two-day drive from Los Angeles, I arrived at the center the morning of January 31, 1994, via twisting two-lane roads that run past the outskirts of Santa Fe. Despite a hand-drawn map, I managed to make a wrong turn up an unplowed dirt road buried in six inches of fresh snow. As the road climbed, it hugged the edge of a hill abutting a sheer drop, and I thanked God for my Michigan roots and driving-in-snow experience. Finally, I reached a crest with a modest turnaround; a sign informed me that I was within the Santa Fe National Forest. As I assessed the under-wheel possibilities of turning back, I had my first view of the center—a low-slung, V-shaped ranch-style building nestled far below. I would learn later that the center's property encompasses 680 acres in a private valley adjacent to the national forest; the site includes two ponds, a stream, and a waterfall. But at the time, with my car's hood nosing precariously over the cliff edge, I could just turn around and retrace my way down the incline. I did so, praying away any oncoming traffic, spinning my tires,



and following my own narrow wheel ruts—the only ones available.

## REDISCOVERING MEANING

People choose sabbaticals for widely divergent reasons—some in preparation for new ministry; other as closure to old; some for learning; still others as an antidote to burnout. Many, myself included, come to the Sangre de Cristo Center intrigued by the invitation (articulated in its literature) to *refoundation* rather than renewal. At forty-something and “in the middle way” that T. S. Eliot describes, I sought neither the renewal afforded by academic credits nor additional degrees, but a process of rediscovering meaning. I didn’t feel burned out, wounded, or lost; instead, I arrived wanting greater integration of religious life, ministry, and personhood. Six years of ministry in Washington, D.C., working with the provincials of religious orders of men of the United States, had blessed me with an appreciation for the gift of religious life. I had been privileged to work with and for some of the most intelligent, caring, and visionary men and women religious in the world. I did not need “updating”; in many ways, I had had six straight years of the best of it. What I wanted from Sangre was a breathing space to process it all for myself in the silence and mountains, a chance to meet and greet and befriend all my midlife questions, blessings, demons, and gifts.

I was transitioning to a new ministry on an opposite coast and had just celebrated my silver jubilee. I wanted a time to meet myself—without turning back—to face myself in my middle adulthood with the questions, Who am I at this moment of life? Is there congruence between that public proclamation and my deepest self? I wanted to confront questions of commitment and meaning by making deeper and stronger “tire tracks” through my midlife wilderness. As I told my friends and family, I was off to “midlife vow camp.”

Why did I choose Sangre’s program over so many others? I have been attracted by Sangre’s prospectus, which suggested a twofold approach: an examination of the “fundamental understandings, motives, and movements of a lifetime of ministry” and the “development of those modes of being and doing that will bring each person’s basic faith and central values effectively into future ministry.” I wanted to spend time with this process in a gender-integrated community.

## ADJUSTING TO SANGRE CONTEXT

Even so, the beginning was not easy for me. Although the Sangre prospectus, which I had read

months earlier, clearly indicated that the program was structured, community-based, and fairly contemplative, I initially felt confined. The style of community living and interaction, communal prayer, classes, and group recreation resurrected memories of my 1968 novitiate and some of its “one foot in the *Baltimore Catechism*, the other in *aggiornamento*” milieu. Soon after arrival, the few of us who had driven to the center were asked (in order to help build community) to avoid using our cars and to travel to Santa Fe on the two weekly excursion days—Wednesday and Saturday—with everyone else, in the center’s vans. The schedule also called for us to share communal housework, dishwashing responsibilities, and twice-a-day prayer/liturgy, and to spend our evening free time playing cards, making popcorn, or sitting together in the lounge before a roaring fire. I could see that surviving and thriving through the hundred days would not be eased with any of the comfort-crutches I often rely on. Here, I saw, it would be difficult to escape to the “outside,” which I favor. Instead, Sangre seemed designed to take me beyond noise, ministry, and mobility to strange and (for me) frightening inside spaces.

My thirty-two colleagues, hailing from the United States, Canada, Ireland, Australia, and New Zealand, all seemed older, more stable, less fidgety, and more serene than I felt. At 45, I was one of the four youngest; the average age was mid-fifties. My previous usual schedule had called for hopping on and off planes every few weeks and hurtling through time zones. I began to realize, with some panic, that there would be no airports, movies, plays, or restaurants for the next three months. Had I made an enormous mistake? I felt my anxiety level ratchet up as the first weeks unfolded.

No area of the United States looks as stark and as sensuous as the Southwest. The seductive contours of the landscape, washed in desert light and color, distract most visitors from the essential fact that much of its current space represents what is no longer there—land worn away over thousands of years by wind and water erosion to create the valleys and arroyos and canyons where people now live. In other words, New Mexico is largely “negative space.” What towers above—what we look up to and think of as mountains and hills, buttes and mesas—once actually represented sea level. The spaces below, where we now walk and talk and breathe, were carved away from the mass. Over the weeks, as this idea took root, I began to see the environment as a metaphor for my own sabbatical purposes: seeing what is here now as coming from that which has been cut away. The loss of so many of the “props” I was accustomed to using as buffers to keep me from myself would act as a

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## Letting go to be free of old patterns always reveals other options for more loving, creative, and compassionate living

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necessary erosion to form new and amazing contours within my soul.

The Sangre staff—three Christian Brothers and two Franciscan Sisters—guided us into the program gently and gradually. (Sangre's staff provides remarkable stability and experience; its current director, Bernie LoCoco, F.S.C., has served in the position for nine years and is only the fourth director in the center's thirty-three-year history.) The staff not only lived, ate, prayed, and recreated with us; they also offered spiritual direction and strong role modeling regarding collaboration, team ministry, and commitment to living a balanced personal life.

Early on, each staff member shared his or her personal midlife story with the group to help us focus on our own journeys. The staff also led sessions dealing with transition, expectations, and feelings; suggested a program reading list; helped us form small discussion groups; and facilitated consensus building on communal prayer style and liturgical issues.

Gradually, the pace picked up, and we fell into a predictable routine. Mornings consisted of breakfast, a brief period of housework, some quiet time, morning prayer, and large-group class lectures. We broke for lunch and a block of free time in the afternoon, during which we hiked, wrote letters, did laundry, read, slept, and continued the process of meeting and greeting. A late afternoon liturgy, supper, the evening news, and classes made for very full days. Wednesdays and Saturdays allowed for forays into Santa Fe for purposes of tourism, shopping, movies, museum going, and art gallery hopping. Weekends offered a more elaborate Sunday liturgy, a relaxing brunch, and an evening meal usually prepared by volunteer coed teams. Saturdays and Sundays also offered

options such as video screenings, group hikes, and square-dancing sessions. Eventually, we enjoyed several terrific parties fueled by communal zaniness. A number of all-day field trips to area points of interest also showed up periodically on the schedule.

### HOLISTIC APPROACH

Sangre's holistic philosophy stresses the interconnections among body, soul, mind, and spirit and the need for healthy integration of all components. In the kitchen this translated into the preparation of delicious lowfat meals, often including vegetarian entrees. We sampled tofu and bean curd gingerly (with most failing to convert). Red meat was served rarely; fresh fruits were plentiful. As for exercise, Sangre's spectacular setting, balmy climate, fresh air, trails, and mesas invited exploration from the outset. While some wilderness-oriented peers took to the high trails immediately, most of us started modestly, found ourselves walking and hiking on higher and steeper trails as the weeks went by, and discovered a definite improvement in our cardiovascular endurance by the end of the program. On the "desert days" of silence and recollection sprinkled throughout the program, one could always spot dots of color disappearing into the hills as participants wandered off with Bibles, backpacks, water bottles, and bag lunches.

Over the weeks, as my initial anxieties dissipated, I began to slow down and accept Sangre, the schedule, and my peers for their own giftedness. Many people reported the need to sleep a great deal in the beginning—partly to acclimate to the altitude and partly to overcome exhaustion from ministry, international travel, and cultural adjustment. Personally, I felt a need to unwind, relax my grip, and "let things be." Now not expected (or able) to "do" anything, I gradually unclenched enough to begin noticing who and what surrounded me, what I was seeing, reading, and hearing. This internalizing process has been factored into the grand design of the program at Sangre, which is divided into two parts. The first half focuses on the journey inward. Then, after an eight-day silent directed retreat, the second half concentrates on reinsertion into ministry and community on the journey outward.

The Sangre syllabus offers a variety of workshops taught by staff and visiting lecturers. Sessions cover topics such as scripture and liturgical studies, moral and environmental theology, human sexuality and intimacy, personality typology, community living skills, ministry burnout, peace and justice education, and Native American spirituality. The chronology and pacing of the topics respected the "inward" and



"outward" framework, and our common experience of the lectures enabled us to discuss, argue, and reflect on their topics together.

Gradually, we were introduced to nonacademic experiences, such as dream interpretation, body imaging, foot massage, and crafts such as pottery making, weaving, and watercolor painting. I participated in a watercolor class taught by a professional artist from Santa Fe. Watercolor intrigued me. The more I painted, the more I found the medium a fascinating metaphor in its own right: an elusive blend of utter abandon and highly controlled technique that said much to me about the larger art of living with both passion and boundaries.

Others used photography, poetry writing, music, and needlepoint for artistic expression. These "right-brain" experiences, new to many people, provided a welcome complement to the intellectual life of the program and uncovered skills and interests previously buried. Full-body massage, at first "unknown territory" for many, also became a popular option provided weekly (for a nominal extra fee) at the center by four visiting certified therapists.

## JOURNAL KEEPING

Early in the program we were introduced to a journal-keeping approach that became a compass for my spiritual journey and a tool with deep implications for my spiritual growth. Moreover, the act of keeping a journal emphasized spiritual development as a process. It rooted spirituality in life and became much more than writing; it became a way to pray. Journal keeping led me into an understanding that my patterns of thought and behavior—especially those I find entrapping, negative, or troubling—often arise from needs I had once felt and experienced on a primal basis (often in childhood) but had never processed into any sense of inner freedom. Looking at the impact of these experiences allowed me to reconnect with the root causes of my feelings and drives—and, to the extent that I could get in touch with these, I began to become free enough to drop some unwanted patterns and to be released from an endless and subtle cycle of self-criticism.

I found that bringing my emotional issues to prayer through reflection and journal keeping, searching for their roots, understanding their origins, and recognizing that I no longer wanted or needed distressing behaviors allowed me in some instances to become liberated from patterns of feeling and action that I had struggled with, had never conquered, and had felt guilty about for years.

This moving away from a perfection model of spirituality (a hopeless albeit time-honored approach of

setting ourselves up for perfection, which we can never attain) to one of awareness and compassion (in which we honestly explore our issues and feelings from their sources) was, for me, well worth the price of admission to Sangre. The pervading emphasis on "praying our experiences" (staff member Joseph Schmidt's book by the same title provided background and basis for this approach) made more sense to me than any other method of spiritual growth I have encountered over a lifetime of religious conferences. This method of prayer moved what I had formerly regarded as distractions to the center of my prayer and invited me to engage in deeper and deeper explorations of my motivations and to discern whether they were in harmony with the gospels and congruent with who I am and the person I am called to become.

During the weeks and months I lived at Sangre, I was thus led to ponder deeply my original questions: Who am I at this moment in my life? Is there congruence between that public proclamation and my deepest self? Once I was able to put in tandem the strategies of reflecting, writing, and praying about my own experiences, feelings, and issues, I knew I was at the heart of the sabbatical.

Even now, over a full year since my sabbatical began, this self-discovery process continues to invite me to greater reflection, deeper insight, personal clarity, and the possibility of change. Any unfinished business seems to invite me back to uncover more connections and see greater dimensions of God's compassionate and liberating love. Furthermore, letting go to be free of old patterns always reveals other options for more loving, creative, and compassionate living. I must emphasize that in regard to behavior, this psychospiritual approach never stops at saying, "This is just the way I am, and I'm fine." Some months later, tested in "the real world," the dynamic remains consistent: it works as well in the heat of ministry as it did in the luxury of time and space during the sabbatical.

## SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

The call of cable television, my social life in Washington, D.C., and Los Angeles, my dust-gathering car, and "freedom" sounded fainter and fainter: the call of the inside became much more alluring. It was good just to sit, read, walk, write, think. I was amazed by myself: perhaps I was actually beginning to see personal shadows claiming some rightful attention. Soul erosion was indeed at work: the positive and negative spaces within me were under transformation; a new midlife geography was being sculpted.



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## The sabbatical provided a healthy and sustained experience of community and celibate living—and offered all of us greater insight into the feelings and style of the opposite sex

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Spiritual direction is an integral and ongoing component of the Sangre experience; it is not considered optional or offered for an additional fee, as in some other programs. We were asked to select a staff member as a director and to see that person regularly—usually once a week. The coed staff configuration allowed participants to choose the person with whom they felt most comfortable, whether of the same or opposite gender. As the weeks went by, I found that weekly sessions with my director became the most profound single element of my program. He was gentle and understanding but would not allow me to evade key issues that emerged. Our interaction began slowly and tentatively, but soon I was comfortable expressing myself openly with him. We encountered some small victories, the turbulence of emotion, moments of darkness and frustration, and many moments of grace. The sessions never felt magical: they were grounded in reality, in the “mud and messiness” of what I was exploring. They integrated with my journal keeping in a deepening spiral of self-awareness, and God’s grace moved in me as I climbed the hills, savored the tentative spring sunlight, walked the trails, treasured God’s grace moving in my companions, wrote, read, and kept trying to appreciate vegetarian cuisine.

### CAMARADERIE FLOURISHES

Meanwhile, friendships blossomed. The dynamic of living and working closely in a gender-integrated

community offered the benefit of interacting with persons of the opposite sex on a daily, realistic, pragmatic level. Men and women lived together in community; we prayed, ate, washed dishes, attended classes, and enjoyed free time together. The sabbatical provided a healthy and sustained experience of community and celibate living—and offered all of us greater insight into the feelings and style of the opposite sex.

As a community, we were pilgrims together; while each of us walked a private path, our trails converged often. The common traditions of religious life connected most of us, and the ministry and life commitment of the four diocesan priests in the class made their presence equally powerful. Their honesty, humor, faith sharing, and willingness to collaborate in shaping and celebrating liturgical prayer and worship made a significant impression on many—especially some who had come with strong anticlerical feelings and experiences.

The eight-day silent directed retreat in midprogram, which for us led directly into Holy Week, was a powerful experience. To accommodate the retreat schedule’s need for daily spiritual direction sessions, three additional people were added to the staff. I selected a Franciscan friar who listened to me, respected my story, and shared his own truth. Suffering and doubt, death and dying, waiting in the tomb, spring and Resurrection: as a group and as individuals, we all lived the Paschal Mystery during those two weeks of retreat and Holy Week.

### PREPARING FOR REENTRY

With the outward journey now begun, the program dynamic shifted. Classes focused on reinsertion into ministry and community life; additional desert days gave us the chance to reflect on the reality of going home. We began to acknowledge the inevitability of the program’s end, the urgency of unfinished business, the emotional pain of saying goodbye to new friends, the strategies to be crafted for a healthy leave-taking. An optional wilderness weekend, which offered hiking, camping, and rappelling down a cliff, provided a profound experience in community, interdependence, and risk/trust for many. Another free travel weekend gave us the chance, in self-selected groups, to explore sites in the Southwest, from Las Vegas and the Grand Canyon to White Sands and Carlsbad Caverns.

On one of my final hikes, I found my way to the same hill I had driven up that first morning. The snow on the road was gone: it glistened only on the highest peaks. I walked on hard-packed clay warmed by the mid-May sun and muddied by a morning rain;



going uphill this time, even on foot, was easier than the January car journey had been. Once again I saw the center below, in its valley—no longer mysterious, now “home” after three and a half months. This time there were no narrow tire tracks to follow downhill; instead, the whole road back stretched clearly (though muddily) before me. It seemed an apt metaphor for what I expected on returning to ministry: clarity, meaning, and direction ahead, but reachable only by faithful journeying through more midlife “mud.” At the bottom of the hill, I thanked God for that mud and for my understanding of its giftedness.

In a final small-group session, we shared personal reflections and outcomes. For some, the hundred days had offered clarity regarding changes they wanted to make in ministry or living situations. A number had gotten in touch with painful childhood experiences that continued to affect their adult lives and, through consciousness, had achieved a degree of liberation from them. Others recognized that they wished to develop a better-integrated personal life that included prayer, ministry, leisure, and friendship. Many affirmed their desire to continue formal spiritual direction back home.

Despite the pain of goodbyes, I was ready to leave. I had, as I had hoped, met myself, asked some scary but important questions, discovered strategies to hear the answers, and fallen in love again with my God. I had been blessed with a sense of peace and “rightness” about my vocation, my journey, and the God who loved me in New Mexico and was waiting as well in Los Angeles.

The staff prepared us for the program’s ending as gently and thoroughly as possible, inviting us to

process, to feel, to talk, to ritualize in whatever ways would be helpful. The final week’s schedule was light on structure, long on time to say final goodbyes to favorite trails and climbers. We said many goodbyes: to our small groups, to our directors, and to our entire class experience in a joyful end-of-session picnic and community party. A closing liturgy and formal banquet provided the memories for the last evening. The next morning, the same vans that had helped bond us as “Sangre’s 64th” on field trips and Santa Fe runs ferried us to homebound airplanes and trains. We were catapulted out of New Mexico to Dublin and Milwaukee, Toledo and South Bend, Sydney, Winnipeg, San Francisco, and Phillipsburg, Kansas.

Sangre may not be for every midlife wanderer. It asks a willingness to let go in the middle way; to live for three months in the desert; to participate again in a model of community living that generates its own graces; to rediscover the impulse to commitment, the original love that said yes to a greater love. But for those of us who were willing to negotiate our own valleys and canyons and mud in the midst of Sangre’s desert foothills, a refoundation for the second half of life became a reality.



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# BOOK REVIEW

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*Sacred Lies and Silences: A Psychology of Religious Disguise*, by Vernon Ruland, S.J. Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1994. 155 pp. (paperback). \$10.95.

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**T**he fabric of pastoral ministry corresponds to a faith and cultural environment in which boundaries are continually stretched, challenged, and revised. As woman and men engaged in diverse areas of ministry, we live in multilayered, inconsistent worlds in which the sacred and its disguises interact. Often, our own truths, lies, and prejudices, whether spoken or silent, mingle with the religious depths and mixed messages of others. How does one distinguish the masquerade from the authentic?

*Sacred Lies and Silences* attempts to ferret the legitimate expressions of spirituality from the distorted and the bogus, both religious and psychological. The phrase "sacred lies" refers to the practice of counterfeit religion: the pious words and shallow displays that stem from inadequate religious conviction, habit, or even deceit and sham. "Silences" alludes to the religious experiences of individuals who fail to identify themselves as religious or who are uncomfortable about articulating matters of the spirit. This book investigates these strata of ambiguity, which we encounter daily.

Vernon Ruland, who holds a doctorate in religion and literature from the University of Chicago, combines learning from his practice as a licensed marriage and family counselor with the wisdom gained by teaching courses in world religion and the psychology of religion. This book reflects his years of teaching as a professor of religious studies in the multicultural, multifait, and nonfaith settings of the University of California at San Francisco and experiencing the social diversity that the Bay Area offers. With the precision of a cartographer, Ruland examines the "religious landscape" of misleading impressions with a style that favors terse, clearly nuanced,

and well-illuminated examples culled from literature, case studies, and ecumenical and interfaith traditions cherished in both the East and West.

The introductory paragraph of chapter 1 establishes the interactive borders of spirituality, myth, and psychotherapy that the author's work systematically surveys: "Any psychology of religious experience ought to begin by exploring a basic ambiguity that undercuts all surveys and conjectures. This can be summed up in two brief truisms. Granted that many people are just what they seem, some prove far more religious than they appear. And second, some prove far less religious than they appear."

Within this framework, Ruland charts the territory of the spiritually balanced individual, contrasting the myriad distortions one can assume, chameleonlike, when personality is endangered. His journey takes the reader through eight chapters that investigate a range of topics: conscience, prayer, self-image and sacred image, religious breakdown and breakthrough, religious obsession, dependency, cults, depression, and finally, healing. Within these chapters, there are further specialized explorations of religious paranoia, the demonic, saints and anorexics, religious avoidance, and the inflated guru. With relentless impartiality, Ruland investigates the dark side and the positive growth these disguises can encourage.

Ruland's recurring theme underscores the critical inclusion and essential balance of both religious growth and psychological growth. While each boasts distinct but inseparable components, each demands the influence of the other for an integral human life.

*Sacred Lies and Silences* is a valuable and insightful resource for those engaged in the diverse field of pastoral ministry, for mental health professionals who are respectful of religion, and for individuals who live in religious community. The reader will have met the religious personalities that Ruland vividly describes in real life, in literature, or in honest mirror moments. Once opened, *Sacred Lies and Silences* cannot be put down. Ruland compellingly assists us in delving into our religious patterns and facades in order to integrate psyche and religion.

—John P. Mossi, S.J., D.Min.